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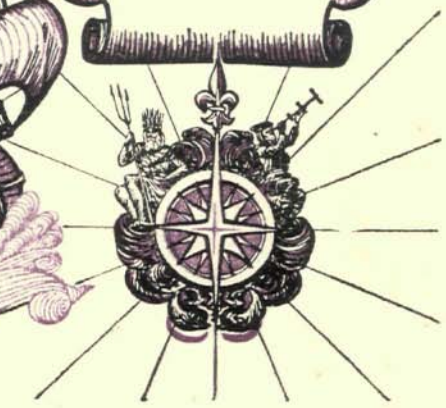

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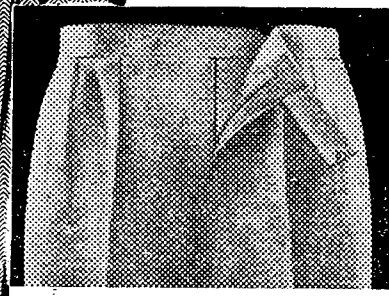

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ARGOSY

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Green Tide

WHEN earth is merry with the wine of Spring
And puts on all its tender greenery
Gay-garlanded, with brightness blossoming,
And loud with cuckoo-counterpoint ; ah, see
Swifter than wind, more splendid than the dawn,
The milk-white unicorn !

Soaring like Pegasus he skims the wood,
Wimpling the air as water ; a tide of green
Flows out before him in a leafy flood :
His pearl-pale coat, his delicate proud mien
Proclaim him, fresh from Olympian pasturing,
The essence of all Spring.

MARGARET RHODES

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PANIC INN

In the recesses of the windows long faces nodded sleepily

by ANTHONY STEVEN

IN some ways we Italians are slaves to our past. It is as though we felt a sense of guilt towards all the old gods and goddesses to whom we once built temples, and whom we have long since disowned. There are many places, in the countryside particularly, where the logical explanations of quite ordinary occurrences are rejected in a sly attempt to appease neglected and resentful deities. In point of fact, I often wonder whether there isn't a good deal less neglect than the parish priest ever imagines.

I can give you a perfect example of what I mean.

Last year I was looking for a location for a film I was making in Rome. The script called for a deserted house, not too tumbled into ruin, but standing in some lonely place, so that it would wear naturally a proper air of mystery and desolation. You know the sort of thing. It never struck me it would be hard to find, but I scoured the countryside without coming across what I wanted.

I had reached the point of wondering whether our budget would stretch to building the requisite set, when I ran into a friend who remembered an old inn he had seen the previous autumn near the sea on the other side of Cervetri.

He was an ornithologist, and he had travelled up there with the intention of joining a fellow bird-watcher for a few days on the marshes. His plans came to nothing. On arrival at the nearby village of Monte Parvenio, he learned that his friend had that morning been found drowned.

As far as he could discover, there were no witnesses of the tragedy. He did what he could. He wired the dead man's relatives, contacted the proper authorities, and arranged for the conveyance of the body back to Rome for burial.

The evening before his departure, he strolled out along the headland to the little bay where the body had been washed ashore, and it was while he was returning that he caught sight of the inn. It lay half a mile away across the marshes, completely on its own. The minor road which once brought it custom had fallen into

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disuse after the construction of a national highway some distance inland during the late 'twenties.

It crossed his mind that it would make an ideal bird-watcher's post. He did not have time to visit it, but he had seen no sign of life, and he was as certain as he reasonably could be that it was deserted.

I decided there and then that the inn was at least worth investigating. Next morning I told my driver to fetch the shooting-brake.

"There's a place out in the Etruscan country we're going to have a look at," I said, "on the other side of Cervetri."

Paolo is a good-natured youth, but his face became gloomy at the news. He has the townsman's contempt for the country, and in the past ten days he had had his bellyful of the pastoral scene.

"Very good, Don Giuseppe," he muttered, and went moodily away.

Once behind the wheel, however, his ill-humour vanished quickly enough. He drove as he always drives, with a kind of slapdash fluency, putting the crowded suburbs of the city expertly behind us.

There was a smile on his lips and a cigarette between them. I knew the signs. He was thinking of girls. He couldn't leave them alone for long, even in his thoughts.

"How's Caterina?" I asked.

Paolo's brow clouded.

"I threw her over . . . a hopeless girl, Caterina."

His face became pink with newer and more stirring memories.

"I'm with Francesca now. You know the baker in the Borgo Mastese? The fat one with the scar? His daughter. A wonderful girl, Don Giuseppe."

His excitement transferred itself to the accelerator. The shooting-brake sailed swiftly out into the Campagna.

It was April, and the young wheat was like a haze over the fields. The only clouds lay small and white on the horizon. Beyond was the Tyrrhenian Sea.

We skirted Cervetri and the landscape changed. It was wild and untilled. There were rough meadows of asphodel and sudden small ravines. In the middle distance rose the great green mushroom tombs of the Etruscan kings.

I think I dozed. When I opened my eyes I saw an ancient village perched like a battered felt hat on top of a smooth-sided hill, and the sea glinting beyond.

I checked with the map. It was Monte Parvenio.

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" We'll get something to eat in the village," I said. " They'll probably be able to tell us about the inn there."

The road ran straight between tall poplars towards the hill. We passed a man on a donkey, and there were people scratching away at the poorly-cultivated fields on either side.

We reached the foot of the hill. The road snaked sharply upwards. The shooting-brake took it in bottom gear.

The narrow streets of Monte Parvenio lay empty under the hot beat of the noonday sun. Most of the villagers were in the fields. There was a tiny piazza where we parked and got out in search of somewhere to eat.

We found a café in a cul-de-sac. In front of it was a dry fountain set round with tables and benches. The doorway had a bead curtain against the flies, and when we pushed through it, the room beyond was dark and cool as a cellar, with flagstones underfoot, and the air ripe with garlic and wine.

It was a moment before I could make out the man resting on his broom. He greeted us civilly. We could eat outside by the fountain.

He served us himself, bringing us wine and bread and two bowls of thin stew cooked with olives. He was a big fellow, past sixty, with gold rings in his ears and fine moustaches. His clothes were like any peasant's, but the way he moved suggested the sea.

As Paolo and I ate, sounds began reaching us from the piazza. People were returning from the fields. The village was coming to midday life. But no one entered the cul-de-sac. We were left undisturbed at our meal.

There was certainly nothing to commend it. Even the wine was poor stuff, with a harsh, tarry taste, and Paolo, after grimacing over his glass, tossed the contents into the fountain. The wine sluiced over the marble Neptune which formed the centre-piece, and ran down his beard and spread knees into the basin below.

It was a vigorous gesture into which went the sum total of his displeasure with the whole race of peasantry, and he was better pleased than I to discover the landlord watching us from the door.

But there was nothing to be read upon the ruddy face or in the keen eyes. The man turned on his heel and rolled inside.

" There was no need to do that," I said. " You've probably hurt his feelings."

Paolo grinned behind his gaily-coloured American tie.

"A good job if I have. He's got a nerve, trying to pass stuff like that off on honest people."

" It's a poor district. If there was a better wine he would have served it."

Paolo snorted his disbelief. Like most of his kind, he is a

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hopeless judge of character. A little later, I called for the bill.

If the landlord had been offended, he gave no indication of it now. On the contrary, he was smiling cheerfully. His eyes wandered from the bottle (which I had had the grace to finish) and lighted with a fond look on the statue.

"You like my Neptune?" he asked blandly.

I examined it closely for the first time, and was ashamed to discover only now that it was evidently a fine and ancient piece of work.

I asked him where it came from.

"Out of the sea," he answered, taking obvious pleasure in my surprise.

"We were fishing one day. He came up with the trawl . . . The whole crew were delighted, since such a capture could only be regarded as a happy omen for the future.

"And it's true that from that day onwards we knew no real misfortune. Since the vessel was mine, I was the old gentleman's proper guardian, and when I retired here I gave him a place of honour in my home."

His story was so unexpected, and pleased me so much, that it was not until Paolo and I were driving out of the western entrance to the village that I realized I had not asked him whether the inn on the marshes was inhabited. Not that it mattered. We should probably meet someone else who could tell us, and even if we did not, we hadn't far to go to find out for ourselves.

On this side of the hill the road dropped away less abruptly. The sea was very near, calm and shining, but the high ridge of land that ran into it, forming the headland of which my friend had spoken, obliterated any view we might have had of the marshes to the north.

Where the road from Monte Parvenio began its southward swing we parked and locked the brake, leaving our jackets on the seat, and started off on foot towards the summit of the ridge. The going was uneven, the ground strewn with boulders and tangled with thorn.

Among the thorn, as we approached the summit, there were goats grazing, and further on we met the goatherd eating his meal of bread and olives. Nearby, his pony cropped the short turf.

He rose to greet us. He was a slender man of middle height, and under his broad-brimmed straw hat he had the faun-like face and queer yellow eyes one sometimes meets in these parts. He wore a jerkin over his faded shirt, goat-skin trousers, and the customary long spurs.

I pointed in the direction of the still invisible marshes.

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"Can you tell us anything about the inn over there? Does anybody live there?"

The yellow eyes glared at me with suddenly kindled curiosity. "You are going there?"

I told him briefly the purpose of our visit. It might only have been my imagination, but I received the impression that the knowledge in some way excited him.

But when he answered, his voice betrayed no emotion.

"No," he said. "No people live there." And then, as though to encourage us, "From what you say, it is perhaps the place you are looking for."

I gave him a few lire, and his eyes followed us as we walked away.

At the top of the ridge, we had our first sight of the inn. Even at that distance I could tell it was very much the kind of house I had been hoping for: a low, square, two-storey building of weathered stone, with a squat tower at its north-west corner and an alignment of sunken roofs that suggested an inner courtyard. The front of the house was pierced by a great central archway and double rows of windows looking south-west towards the sun. The windows had the blind stare that comes from an absence of glass.

Over the whole melancholy expanse, brooding in the brightness of a spring afternoon, there was no other sign of human habitation. Only the old road followed the coast like a mildewed thread towards the north.

We plunged down the steep incline and set off at a brisk pace over the marshes.

I glanced back once. The goatherd, seated on his pony now, was watching us from the skyline. I waved to him, but without responding he clapped spurs to his mount and galloped out of view.

We had covered, I suppose, half the distance to the inn, when something about the windows caught and held my attention. They had changed, though in what way it was difficult to say. It might have been an effect of the light. They had lost the blind, empty look I had noticed earlier.

I said nothing to Paolo, but after a while he stopped, peering hard and swearing gently under his breath. It had nothing to do with the light.

"That blasted goatherd!" he said. "The place isn't empty at all."

Behind the windows, behind every one of them, there was movement; a tiny restlessness, shadowy and obscure, but having its origins, beyond all possibility of doubt, in life itself.

Paolo was ready to call the visit off. I gave him a cigarette and lit one for myself.

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"Maybe it isn't," I said. "But now we've come so far, we'll make sure."

We continued our advance towards the solitary house.

If one or two of the windows had betrayed signs of occupation, the notion would have been perfectly acceptable. But that there should be movement behind all of them was at odds with probability and left me at the time, I remember, with a vague sensation of disquiet that was not to be shaken off until we had drawn very close to the house, and the cause stood revealed.

Paolo gasped, "Horses!"

In the recesses of the windows, upstairs and down, long faces nodded sleepily in the heat of the afternoon.

It was a ridiculous scene, with a kind of bizarre charm, but it outraged Paolo's urban sense of propriety, and he rushed forward to destroy it, clapping his hands and shouting at the top of his voice.

The sleepy heads shot up in terrified alertness. Then, with the speed of lightning, they were gone, and from the interior of the old building came a noise like rolling thunder.

I caught up with Paolo as he reached the archway, and simultaneously we threw ourselves back against the wall to let the herd by. They came out bunched, filling the air with the warm odour of their bodies and the fierce drumming of their hoofs, thirty or forty sturdy creatures, manes and tails flying, making a frenzied bid for the freedom of the marshes. Once clear of the inn, they broke formation and sped north.

Paolo pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

"Horses," he repeated dubiously.

And then, as though questioning the evidence of his own eyes, "Horses?"

"Wild horses," I said. They'd probably been using the inn for years past, sheltering there in winter against the weather and in summer from the flies.

We turned and walked through the archway. Beyond, as the lie of the roofs had suggested, was a courtyard. My guess had been a good one. The whole of it was carpeted with the dried, trodden dung of horses, with here and there scattered droppings of more recent origin.

The stifling, ammoniac odour of the herd stung our nostrils. Complete silence reigned.

Round the courtyard ran a gallery onto which gave the rooms of the upper storey. It was a strong structure supported by stone pillars and reached by a shallow flight of stairs. But the steps, like the surface of the courtyard, had vanished beneath a covering of dung, so that the flight had more the appearance of a ramp.

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I called out, "Is anybody there?"

There was no reply. Only the faint answering echo of my voice.

We began exploring. The kitchens, the servants' quarters, the public rooms. Most of the doors had gone as the glass had from the windows. In places the ceilings had collapsed. Everywhere there was dust and decay, and the same visible testimony of the horses' occupation.

Finally, we climbed the ramp to the gallery and made a tour of the upstairs rooms. These, too, the horses had made their own. The last room was the turret room. There were windows on three sides, and in it we found the only piece of furniture we had encountered—a giant bed with remnants of a tattered awning still hanging over it.

We were hot and dusty. Paolo sank down on a corner of the bed, while I wandered over to the central window and leaned out to catch the breeze from the sea. One way I could see the headland, the other the marshes to the north. A mile off the herd was grazing peacefully.

Presently I turned back to the room.

"Well," I said happily, "this is it, Paolo. This is what I've been wanting . . ."

I broke off. After the brightness of the daylight outside, Paolo had seemed at first a rather indistinct figure. But now my eyes adjusted themselves. He sat with his feet firmly planted on the ground, his hands gripping the angles of the wooden frame behind him to take the weight off his shoulders—a lean young man in a blue shirt and a pair of old khaki drill trousers that had been washed so often they were almost white. And it was the sight of these trousers which now riveted my attention.

Below the knees they were no longer white. They were black as pitch, and even as I watched the blackness advanced towards the knees and over them.

"Paolo!" I bawled in a voice that made him leap in terror from the bed. "Your trousers, man! Your trousers!"

In the same instant I glanced down at mine, which were of stuff as light as his, and I beheld the same moving blackness extending from the turn-ups to the thighs. How much the eye photographs in a split second of time when fear lights the scene like an exploding flash-bulb!

Low over the floor floated a grey, undulating mist, and from the cracks in the walls and from behind the hanging ribbons of wallpaper there flowed down towards it and merged with it a dozen slender rivulets of black. Where we stood the mist about our feet thickened and swirled, lapping us like an angry tide.

Fleas! The surging mist upon the floor, the rivulets upon the

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walls, and the blackness steadily engulfing us—fleas in their teeming millions summoned from the dark recesses of that dreadful room by the warm smell of human blood.

In that unmeasured flash of time, fear turned to comprehension, and comprehension to panic flight. We were there, and Paolo's wail of dismay was in my ears. Then we were not, and there was the gallery trembling beneath our flying feet. We raced down the ramp like souls possessed, across the courtyard and out through the archway.

It was two hundred yards to the sea. The cloying soil of the marshes plucked like fingers at our shoes, but at last it gave way to solid rock. Then there was nothing. We dropped ten clear feet into the sea.

The relief of those first moments as we surfaced, gasping, from deep water was untold. We rolled and dived, slapping the air from our clothes so that there should be no survival for the enemy.

The water was delicious. It was our friend. It drove out terror as though it had never been, and the noise of our laughter as we splashed about must have carried a long way.

"It was those horses, wasn't it?" Paolo spluttered, coming up for air.

"Nothing of the sort," I retorted, "you're just an ignorant townsman. No horse ever wore a flea in its life."

"Well, what was it?" he persisted.

"How should I know? The descendants of generations of travellers' fleas, most likely. I honestly don't know."

We stopped talking and started searching for a place to land. I had expected a beach, not this smooth drop of volcanic rock. I struck away from the shore, the better to see, and discovered that the formation continued for a long way in each direction without any gap or outcrop offering a line of retreat.

I cast round towards the headland. Beneath the brown cliffs there were white sands.

"Are you a good swimmer, Paolo?"

His shining face regarded me across the water.

"The fish are no better, Don Giuseppe."

"Good. We'll have to make for the headland. There's no way out here."

It meant a longish swim. We kicked off our shoes, and swam in our shirts and trousers. It would have been easier naked, but embarrassing at the other end. We swam steadily, together, and for the first twenty minutes we made good progress. The water was just right. I was enjoying myself.

Suddenly, Paolo swore a good round oath from the back streets where he had been reared.

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"Look, Don Giuseppe! Just look at that!"

I followed his pointing arm.

We had covered perhaps half our journey, and from where we were had an uninterrupted view of the skyline against which I had last seen the goatherd silhouetted. It was lined with people.

For a while we trod water, waving our arms and shouting at them, trying to attract their attention. But, though they were so close it was impossible to believe they neither saw nor heard us, they gave no answering signal.

Then, growing breathless, I understood.

Of course they could see us, just as there was no doubt they could hear us.

We were the reason for their presence on the ridge. We were the spectacle they had gathered there to watch. I would have laid any odds they'd witnessed our panic flight from the inn. And since only the goatherd had known our destination, it was he who must have warned them.

So much was elementary deduction. He would have summoned them only if he had had a very shrewd idea of what was going to happen.

Our plight during those wasted seconds lent precision to my mind, so that my thoughts went racing ahead to the inescapable conclusion.

What had happened to us, what was happening to us now, had happened to other unfortunate strangers who had visited that damnable inn before us.

The predicament in which Paolo and I now found ourselves was one phase in a pattern of events that had been repeated sufficiently often for the villagers to know what to expect. There was no other means of accounting for the silent crowd on the hill-top.

The antics of the victims could always be foreseen to a nicety: the instinctive rush to the sea; the discovery, once in, that there was no easy way out; the natural decision to make for the headland.

And what then?

The question no sooner posed itself than it was answered. A shoulder of the headland rode gently out between us and our spectators. In a matter of seconds, strung out though they were, they were lost to sight.

Paolo and I were still doggedly treading water, he still wasting his breath on vain shouting. I took a quick check on our position. Our relationship to the headland had completely changed, and was changing as I looked. A powerful current was sweeping us rapidly out to sea.

The sea had taken charge.

We swam hard during those next minutes, with a growing

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desperation, but the shore that had been so tantalisingly near was gradually receding. I was beginning to tire, and there was a drawn look about Paolo's face that told its own tale.

"Rest," I panted. "There's no point in wasting the strength we've got left."

We turned on our backs, drifting with the current. I watched the cloudless sky, my mind dull and empty of emotion, so that the first time I felt the light blow against my shoulder, I paid no heed. But then it came again. I moved my eyes. Like some gift from the gods, no straw, but a huge balk of driftwood was floating by.

"Paolo!" I cried. "Paolo, here!"

We had exhausted ourselves more than we knew. It was all we could do to get our legs astride the balk. But we managed, and though it sank beneath our combined weights until the surface of the water covered it, it bore us handsomely.

For a while we were too spent to appreciate the full measure of our good fortune. But as our strength returned, our spirits rose. A light breeze blew with the sun behind it, drying the shirts on our backs. Paolo sang:

As I came back from foreign parts
Across the summer sea,
All the girls of Naples town
Were dancing on the quay . . .

As we made that involuntary voyage, one baffling thought buzzed like a bee in my head. Given all the strange circumstances, how could the inhabitants of Monte Parvenio have behaved with such an utter lack of humanity? How stand by, as they had done, without making any pretence at helping us? I searched, and found no answer.

. . . .

An hour passed. Little by little, I saw that we were altering course. The current was carrying us slowly but surely towards the tip of the headland.

Looking back, I don't remember doubting this would happen. I think I had long ago been persuaded that, dead or alive, we should be cast ashore at the spot where the poor bird-watcher had been found.

And so it turned out.

We drew steadily nearer the headland, until at last the high cliffs loomed over us. Ahead, a low-lying reef cut the water. It was this, I believe, which split the current, so that presently we were borne in towards a small cove on the southern extremity of the point.

They were waiting for us. The group which had watched us

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silently from the summit of the ridge were gathered there upon the shore. At first they didn't see us, but then one of them shouted and their faces came round.

The sight of us affected them in a totally unexpected manner. A babel of dismayed voices came floating out across the water, and while Paolo and I were still wondering what could be amiss, they took to their heels and fled away up the cliff path. In front of all, swiftly outstripping them, galloped the goatherd on his pony.

They were gone. Save for one man, the cove was empty. He rolled up his trousers and waded out to help us ashore. It was the owner of the café.

We drank the brandy from the flask he offered us, and walked up and down to get the circulation going in our numbed legs.

"Why did they run away?" I asked presently.

He smiled.

"What do you expect? No one else ever survived that journey. They were waiting for your dead bodies and you came riding in like tritons with no visible means of support."

I looked at him.

"Were you up there on the ridge with them?"

He shook his head.

"I only found out what happened half an hour ago. I came straight here."

"But this is the twentieth century!" I cried. "These are ordinary hard-working country folk. Not savages. How can they stand by and let people die without raising a finger to help them?"

"The inn is haunted," he said simply. "The spirit of Pan dwells there. Four men from Monte Parvenio lost their lives before the fact was appreciated. After that, people stayed away, and it was only occasional strangers like yourselves who made the mistake of going there."

"They could have been warned! The goatherd could have warned us. He did nothing of the kind. He encouraged us to go!"

"Emilio? He stopped a man going to the inn once. That year the mildew took the grapes and the crops failed. He never made the same mistake again."

I drank some more brandy. As I lowered the flask, a thought struck me.

"Why did you stay when the others ran away?" I held out the flask. "Why did you bring brandy? What made you think we wouldn't die like the rest?"

He fairly beamed with delight.

"But, of course! I knew you'd come to no harm." He threw a beefy arm round Paolo's shoulder. "Our young friend here. What a cunning one! Didn't he fix it?

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"Didn't he make a libation to Neptune? I saw him with my own eyes!"

The blood was beginning to circulate more freely in my legs, and I was increasingly aware of a violent tickling. Paolo, too, was scratching angrily at his shins.

"Tell me, sir." The landlord's voice dropped a shade lower. "What is he like . . . this old Goat-legs?"

"We found him," I replied, "a very irritating character."

* * *

RAINBOW PAVEMENTS

"Nicks and spans," which was perhaps the Cockney boys' favourite game with marbles, was always played with "twoers" small marbles about three-eighths of an inch in diameter. They were unglazed, consequently the two fine lines painted round the equatorial region in either red or green, vanished in the course of an hour or so and they became jet black all over . . .

But "glarneys" were in another category altogether. As the word implies the glarneys were glass marbles, but no ball out of an old mineral-water bottle was ever dignified by receiving the name, though such balls were not despised possessions, and had the rank of twoers.

Glarneys were distinguished by having inside them a twisted coloured pattern. They varied in size from about half an inch to almost two inches in diameter, and in quality from a hair line (actually an *air* line, but so miscalled, even in the antique glass trade) to a really rich conglomerate of bright broad bands of colour. A glarney that had cost a Cockney boy a penny in 1910, will cost a collector of antiques ten shillings today. Some boys were collectors of glarneys, others dealers in them, but the transactions were in terms of marbles and skill.

"Who'll go at my gla-a-a-rney?" a boy would yell, and gaining no ready response would go on yelling. At length, having attracted a collector, he would display the glarney, its glories enhanced by the simple process of sucking it for a moment, and set upon it a premium of so many twoers. The bargain having been made and the premium paid, the owner would spit upon the pavement and poise the glarney on this universal adhesive, while the collector, from a distance of some ten paces, pitched his twoers, and won the prize when he hit it. With the slope of the pavement, and the cracks and ridges in it, not to mention wind and weather, it required a lot of skill to hit the objective, and sometimes the owner of a good big bright glarney collected from his numerous customers quite a bagful of twoers.

JULIAN FRANKLYN, *The Cockney*

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ALMOST AN ANNIVERSARY

"Let's not worry about the future," said Mr. Shottery

by ADRIAN ALINGTON

WISTFULLY Mr. Shottery eyed the dazzling blonde on the opposite pavement.

"I would give a year of my life," he thought, "to be going home with that girl."

Mr. Shottery was sixtyish, stoutish and a widower. He knew his thought to be unworthy and was not a little dismayed when a voice behind him inquired courteously:

"Are you really serious?"

Wheeling round, Mr. Shottery confronted a tall, dark, perfectly dressed man. He said coldly:

"Forgive me, I had no idea that I spoke aloud."

"As a matter of fact," the stranger replied, "you did not. Reading the thoughts of others is a hobby of mine. It is not that I am naturally officious, but sometimes in a modest way I am able to help."

"Don't tell me," said Mr. Shottery sarcastically, "that you are the Devil. Because, if so, I ceased to believe in you when I was fourteen."

"In that case," answered the Devil (for, as they say, it was he), "you will not wish to avail yourself of my services. You are wise, perhaps. And yet . . ." His curious smouldering eyes slid round in the direction of the opposite pavement. "And yet she is certainly a delightful creature; indeed, what a younger generation than yours would call 'a smasher.'"

Mr. Shottery's eyes had almost inadvertently followed those of his companion. The girl had stepped off the pavement to signal to an approaching bus.

The lamplight fell revealingly on a provocative profile, framed by the dazzling blonde cascade. As the Devil had said, she was indeed "a smasher." A strange recklessness took possession of him.

"All right. I was serious. So what?"

The Devil bowed.

"In that case, my dear Mr. Shottery, I shall be delighted to

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fall in with the little bargain which you propose. Shall we go ? "

Blondie stood at the bar of the King's Arms. She was feeling lonely and browned off and hated having to pay for her own drinks. She was interested, therefore, when the two unknown men entered the bar, and elated when the taller and better dressed of the two exclaimed :

" Why, if it isn't little Blondie ! How are you, my dear ? "

" I don't think I have the pleasure of remembering you," Blondie replied distantly, for, though delighted at his recognition, she did not believe in making herself cheap.

" Oh, surely. We met at Queenie's party the other night. My name is Seyton. S-e-y-t-o-n. Oh, by the way, meet my friend Shottery."

" Pleased to meet you," said Blondie.

It was no mere formula of politeness. She had felt herself mysteriously attracted to Mr. Shottery from the moment he had entered the bar. This was queer, because he was by no means young, nor even distinguished looking in a middle-aged, grey-at-the-temples sort of way. Blondie, who flattered herself on being the psychic type, decided that their auras must be in complete harmony.

" What about a little drink ? " asked Mr. Shottery, who thought Blondie more attractive than ever at close quarters.

They sat down at a table near the fire and had a few drinks and it was all very pleasant. Presently Mr. Seyton said :

" Shottery and I are having a little dinner together tonight. It is a rather special occasion, but we should be delighted if you would join us, eh Shottery ? "

" Charmed," murmured Mr. Shottery.

" Oh, but I couldn't," protested Blondie. " Is it a sort of anniversary or something ? "

" Yes," Mr. Seyton replied. " You might certainly call it almost an anniversary."

" Oh well, in that case," Blondie repeated, " I couldn't dream of butting in."

The three of them dined together very pleasantly and had a bottle of champagne. Mr. Shottery found that his original animosity against the Devil had given way to a warm admiration. No one could have handled the situation more sympathetically and capably. Admiration gave way to gratitude, when presently he said :

" I hope you two will forgive me, but I have to keep a very important appointment at the House of Commons."

The others protested, but he shook his head.

" Alas, it really is extremely urgent.

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"A prominent M.P. of my acquaintance is in grave trouble with his conscience. I must be there before the Division. So, if you will excuse me—"

"Your Mr. Seyton seems to have a good many high-up friends," observed Blondie, when he had gone.

"Yes, indeed," replied Mr. Shottery. "He knows practically everybody who is anybody."

Mr. Shottery and Blondie retired to another bar and had a few more drinks. Their auras continued to mingle very happily indeed.

Blondie told him she was quite sure they must have known one another in a previous existence. It was a pity that she hadn't her playing-cards with her or she could have given him a reading. The cards, no doubt, would have shown that their destinies were closely linked.

Presently the barman began to shout "Last orders, please," and "Time, Please."

"Why don't you come back to my little place for a few minutes," Blondie suggested, "and I'll read your cards?"

In the taxi Mr. Shottery permitted himself a few preliminary advances which Blondie received with a delicious reluctance, quite in keeping with Mr. Shottery's slightly dated technique.

Blondie's little place was at the top of a very tall house. Mr. Shottery, aspiring to climb the stairs with boyish vigour, felt puffed and a little dizzy when he reached the top. But the room, with the curtains drawn and the electric fire burning, was delightfully cosy and intimate.

Mr. Shottery had bought some gin before they left the pub. They sat together on a heavily cushioned and highly promising divan and had another drink. Then Blondie said she must go and get the cards.

"Let's not worry about the future," Mr. Shottery demurred. "Isn't the present good enough?"

Blondie said no, he must have his reading—because, after all, that was what he had come for, wasn't it?—but, if he would excuse her, she would first slip into something loose, because she found the concentration very severe and she was particularly anxious to achieve the proper receptive mood.

When Blondie had retired delicately to the bathroom to change, Mr. Shottery walked over to open the window, for the room had grown unduly warm. He was disgusted to find Blondie's little place suddenly behaving as though it were a cabin on a storm bound ship. . . .

Hearing the crash, Blondie hurried in from the bathroom to

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see what was the matter. Standing half clad in the doorway she uttered a terrible scream.

"My dear Mr. Shottery," the Devil protested, when the two next had an opportunity to discuss the matter (in somewhat different surroundings), "I appreciate your natural disappointment. But is it my fault if you were to die at 11.37 p.m. twelve months hence?"

"As one gentleman to another," Mr. Shottery replied, unappeased, "you should have warned me. I consider that you have played me," he paused to choose the most wounding possible phrase, "a devilish shabby trick."

* * *

SHOPPING LIST

Here is an assortment of miscellaneous purchases made by various characters in fiction. Allow yourself one mark for identifying the customer, one for the title of the novel or poem and one for the author, making a possible total of twenty-four. The answers are on page 114.

1. *The French visitor was overcome with ecstasy after her shopping spree. Such hats—the straw—the workmanship—the chic! And all from the basement of D. H. Heavens.*
2. *Sailing away to an exotic land, this devoted couple were eventually able to buy a wedding-ring for the modest price of one shilling.*
3. *Off he went with his father to the mill to buy a length of tweed the colour of a ploughed field, to be made into his first pair of long trews.*
4. *She wanted a souvenir, for, after all, it was her wedding-day, so her husband put sixpence in the slot of the recording machine on the pier and presented her with a record of his voice.*
5. *The customer, having paid three and ninepence for his stuffed canary, indignantly repudiated the charge that he might have any use for the tooth he found among his change.*
6. *Her hobby, indeed, her consuming passion, was her collection of brassières and she would penetrate even to the slums of Mayfair on the track of a new specimen glimpsed in a shop window.*
7. *The youngest sister had a dollar to spend, and if she had bought a* small *bottle of Cologne for her mother she would also have been able to buy herself some pencils.*
8. *This purchase was probably fated to remain in the realms of wishful shopping, for only a very wealthy father could afford to buy six villages for his elder daughter.*

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LOCKED ROOM

On the other side of the door could be heard several soft little thuds, then silence

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

YOU may have read the facts. Francis Seton was found lying on the floor behind his desk, near death from a fractured skull. He had been struck three times across the back of the head with a piece of lead-loaded broom handle. His safe had been robbed. His body was found by his secretary-typist, Iris Lane, and his librarian, Harold Mills, who were, in the polite newspaper phrase, "being questioned."

So far, it seems commonplace. Nothing in that account shows why Superintendent Hadley of the C.I.D. nearly went mad, or why ten o'clock of a fine June morning found him punching at the door-bell of Dr. Gideon Fell's house in Chelsea.

Summer touched the old houses with grace. There was a smoky sparkle on the river, and on the flower-veined green of the Embankment gardens. Upstairs, in the library, with its long windows, Superintendent Hadley found the learned doctor smoking a cigar and reading a magazine.

Dr. Fell's bulk overflowed from a chair nearly large enough to accommodate him. A chuckle animated his several chins, and ran down over the ridges of his waistcoat. He peered up at Hadley over his eye-glasses; his cheeks shone, pinkly transparent, with warmth of welcome. But at Hadley's first words a disconsolate expression drew down the corners of his moustache.

"Seton's conscious," said Hadley. "I've just been talking to him."

Dr. Fell grunted. Reluctantly he put aside the magazine.

"Ah," he said. "And Seton denies the story told by the secretary and the librarian?"

"No. He confirms it."

"In every detail?"

"In every detail."

Dr. Fell puffed out his cheeks. He also took several violent puffs at the cigar, staring at it in a somewhat cross-eyed fashion. His big voice was subdued.

"Do you know, Hadley," he muttered, "I rather expected that."

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"I didn't," snapped Hadley. "I didn't; and I don't. But that's why I'm here. You must have some theory about this impossible burglar who nearly bashed a man's head off and then disappeared like smoke. My forthright theory is that Iris Lane and Harold Mills are lying. If . . . hullo!"

Standing by the window, he broke off and glanced down into the street. His gesture was so urgent that Dr. Fell, with much labour, hoisted himself up wheezily from the chair and lumbered over to the window.

Clear in the strong sunshine, a girl in a white frock was standing on the opposite pavement, by the railings, and peering up at the window. As Dr. Fell threw back the curtains, she looked straight into their eyes.

She was what is called an outdoor girl, with a sturdy and well-shaped body, and a square but very attractive face. Her dark brown hair hung in a long bob. She had light hazel eyes in a tanned earnest face. Her mouth might have been too broad, but she showed fine teeth when she laughed.

"Iris Lane," said Hadley ventriloquially.

Dr. Fell, in an absent-minded way, was startled. He would have expected Francis Seton's typist to be prim and mousy.

When she saw the two men at the window, Iris Lane's expressive face showed many things. Disappointment, surprise, even fear. Her knee moved as though she were about to stamp angrily on the pavement. For a second they thought she would turn and hurry away. Then she seemed to come to a decision. She almost ran across the street towards the house.

"Now what do you suppose—?" Hadley was speculating when the doctor cut him short.

"She wants to see me, confound you," he roared. "Or she did want to see me, until you nearly scared her off."

And the girl herself confirmed it a moment later. She was making an attempt to be calm and even jaunty, but her eyes always moved back to Hadley.

"It seems," she said, after a quick look round the room, "that I'm always trailing the superintendent. Or he's always trailing me. I don't know which."

Hadley nodded. He was non-committal.

"It does seem like that, Miss Lane. Anything in particular on your mind now?"

"Yes. I—I wanted to talk to Dr. Fell. Alone."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because it's my last hope," answered the girl, raising her head. "Because they say nobody, not even a stray dog, is ever turned away from here."

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" Nonsense ! " said Dr. Fell, hugely delighted nevertheless. He covered this with deprecating noises which shook the chandelier, and an offer of refreshment. Hadley saw that the old man was half hooked already, and Hadley despaired.

Yet it seemed impossible to doubt this girl's sincerity. She sat bolt upright in the chair, opening and shutting the catch of a white handbag.

" It's quite simple," she explained, and hunched her shoulders. " Harold Mills and I were alone in the house with Mr. Seton. There was nearly three thousand pounds in the safe in his study."

Dr. Fell frowned.

" So ? As much money as that ? "

" Mr. Seton was leaving," said Iris Lane, with an effort. " He was going abroad, to spend a year in California. He always made his decisions suddenly—just like that." She snapped her fingers. " We didn't know anything about it, Harold and I, until he broke the news that morning. The man from the bank brought the money round ; Mr. Seton put it into the safe, and told us why he had sent for it. That meant we were out of our jobs."

And she began to tell the story.

Of course (Iris admitted to herself), her nerves had been on edge that night. This condition was caused partly by losing a good job at a moment's notice, partly by the thick and thundery weather round the old house in Kensington, and partly by the personality of Francis Seton himself.

Francis Seton was a book-collector. When Iris had first answered his advertisement for a secretary-typist, she had expected to find someone thin and ancient, with double-lensed spectacles. Instead she found a thickset bull of a man, with sandy hair and a blue guileless eye. His energy was prodigious. He animated the old house like a humming-top. He had the genuine collector's passion ; he was generous, and considerate when it did not inconvenience him.

But he whirled off at a new tangent that morning, a hot overcast day, when he called Iris Lane and Harold Mills into his study. They had been working in the long library on the first floor. The study, which opened out of it, was a large room with two windows overlooking a tangled back garden.

Seton stood by the big flat-topped desk in the middle of the study. Out of a canvas bag he was emptying thick packets of bank-notes, one of which fell into the waste-paper basket.

" Look here," he said, with the confiding candour of a child, " I'm off to America. For a year at least."

He seemed pleased at the way his hearers jumped.

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"But, sir—" began Harold Mills.

"Crisis!" said Seton, pointing to a newspaper. "Crisis!" he added, pointing to another. "I'm sick of crises. California's the place for me. Orange groves and sea breezes: at least, that's what the booklets say. Besides, I want to make old Isaacson sick with my 1593 *Venus and Adonis* and the 1623 folio."

His forehead grew lowering and embarrassed.

"I've got to let you both go," he growled. "I'd like to take you both with me. Can't afford it. Sorry; but there it is. I'll give you a month's salary in place of notice. Damn it, I'll give you *two* month's salary in place of notice. How's that?"

Beaming with relief now that this was off his chest, he dismissed the subject briskly. He gathered up the packets of bank-notes, fishing the dropped one out of the waste-paper basket. It made his face crimson to bend over, since Dr. Woodhall had warned him about high blood-pressure; but he was all energy again.

A little iron safe stood against one wall. Seton opened it with his key, poured the money into a tin box, closed the safe, and locked it. In a vague way Iris noted the denominations on the paper bands round the packets of notes: one pound, five pounds, ten, a hundred. A little treasure-trove. Almost a little fortune.

Perhaps because of the heat of the day, there was perspiration on Harold Mills's forehead.

"And when do you want to leave, sir?" he asked.

"Leave? Oh, ah." Seton considered. "The day after to-morrow," he decided.

"The day after tomorrow!"

"Saturday," Seton explained. "Always a good ship leaving. Yes, make it Saturday."

"But your passport—" protested Iris.

"That's completely in order," said Seton coolly.

The word which flashed through Iris Lane's mind just then was "robbed." She could not help it. There are times with everyone when the sight of so much money, all in a lump, makes the fingers itch and brings fantastic dreams of what might be.

She didn't mean it—as she was later to explain to the police. But there was a tantalizing quality in what had happened. Only yesterday she had been safe. Only a week ago she had returned from a holiday in Cornwall, where there had been little to do except lie on lemon-coloured sands in a lemon-coloured bathing-suit; or feel the contrast between sun on baking shoulders and salt water foaming and slipping past her body, in the cold invigoration of the sea. The future would take care of itself.

And more. There was a pleasant-looking man, just on the right side of middle-age, who came to do sketches at the beach. They

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were such intolerably bad sketches that Iris was relieved to discover he was a doctor from London.

By coincidence, a breeze blew one of the sketches past her, and she retrieved it. So they fell into conversation. By coincidence, it developed that the man's name was Charles Woodhall; and that he was Francis Seton's doctor. It astounded Iris, who saw in this a good omen of summer magic. She liked Dr. Woodhall. He was as good a talker as Seton himself, without Seton's untiring bounce. And he knew when to be comfortably silent.

Dr. Woodhall would sit on a camp-stool, attired in ancient flannels, tennis-shoes, and shirt, and draw endless sketches of Iris. A cigarette would hang from the corner of his mouth. He would blink as smoke got into one eye, and wrinkles of amusement deepened from the corners of his eyes almost back to temples that were slightly grey. Meantime, he talked. He talked happily of all things in earth and sky and sea. He also offered a profound apology for the bad sketches. But Iris, though she secretly agreed with him, kept them all; and so passed the fortnight.

They would meet again in London.

And she had a good job to go back to there.

All the future looked pleasant—until Francis Seton exploded everything that morning.

The thunderstorm, which had been imminent all day, broke late in the afternoon.

It brought little relief to Iris. She and Harold Mills went on with their work and were still working long after dinner, in the library under the shaded lamps and the rows of books behind their wire cages. It was a rich room, deep-carpeted like every other room in the house; but it was tainted with damp. Iris's head ached. She had sent off two dozen letters, and arranged every detail of Seton's trip; all he had to do now was to pack his bag. Seton himself was in the study, with the door closed between, cleaning out the litter in his desk.

Harold Mills put down his pen.

"Iris," he said softly.

"Yes?"

Mills glanced towards the closed door of the study, and spoke still more softly.

"I want to ask you something."

"Of course."

She was surprised at his tone. He was sitting at his own writing-table, some distance away from her, with a table-lamp burning at his left. The light of the lamp shone on his flat fair hair, brushed with great precision round his head, on his waxy-coloured face, and

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on his pince-nez. Since he was very young, it was only this pince-nez which gave him the sedate and donnish appearance; this, or the occasional slight fidgeting of his hands.

He almost blurted out the next words.

"What I mean is: are you all right? Financially, I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

She didn't know. She was not even thinking of this now. Dr. Woodhall had promised to drop in that evening, to see Seton. It was nearly eleven now. Seton, who always swore that his immense vitality was due to the regularity of his habits, was as regular as that clock over the mantelpiece. At eleven o'clock he would smoke the last of the ten cigarettes allowed him a day, drink his one whisky-and-soda, and be in bed by eleven-thirty sharp. If Dr. Woodhall didn't hurry . . . .

Iris's head ached still more. Mills kept on talking, but she did not hear him. She awoke to this with a start.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I didn't catch—?"

"I said," repeated the other, somewhat jerkily, "that I'm sorry for more reasons than one that we're leaving."

"So am I, Harold."

"You don't understand. Mine is rather a specialized job. I'll not get another in a hurry." Colour came up under his pince-nez. "No, no, that isn't what I mean. I'm not complaining. It's very decent of Seton to provide two months' salary. But I'd hoped that this job would be more or less permanent. If it turned out to be that, there was something I wanted to do."

"What was that?"

"I wanted to ask you to marry me," said Mills.

There was a silence.

She stared back at him. She had never thought of him as awkward or tongue-tied, or anything like the man who now sat and cracked the joints of his knuckles as though he could not sit still. In fact, she had hardly ever thought of him at all. And his face showed that he knew it.

"Please don't say anything." He got to his feet. "I don't want you to feel you've got to say anything." He began to pace the room with little short steps. "I haven't been exactly—attentive."

"You never even . . ."

He gestured.

"Yes, I know. I'm not like that. I can't be. I wish I could." He stopped his pacing. "This fellow Woodhall, now."

"What about Dr. Woodhall?"

He never got the opportunity to say. This was the point at which they heard, very distinctly, the noise from the next room.

When they tried to describe it afterwards, neither could be sure

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whether it was a yell, or a groan, or the beginning of incoherent words. It might have been a combination of all three. Then there were several soft little thuds, like the sound of a butcher's cleaver across meat on the chopping-block. Then silence, except for the distant whisper of the rain.

That was the story which Iris Lane began to tell at Dr. Fell's flat. Both Dr. Fell and Superintendent Hadley listened with the closest attention, though they had heard it several times before.

"We didn't know what had happened," said Iris, moving her shoulders. "We called out to Mr. Seton, but he didn't answer. We tried the door, but it wouldn't open."

"Was it locked?"

"No; it was warped. The damp from the rain had swollen and warped the wood. Harold tried to get it open, but it wouldn't work until he finally took a run and jumped at it.

"There was nobody in the study except Mr. Seton," she went on. "I know, because I was afraid we should see someone. The place was brilliantly lighted. There's a big bronze chandelier, with electric candles, hanging over the flat-topped desk in the middle. And there was even a light burning in the cloakroom—it's hardly more than a cupboard for a wash-basin, really—which opens out of the study. You could see everything at a glance. And there wasn't anybody hiding in the room."

She paused, visualizing the scene.

Francis Seton lay on the far side of the desk, between the desk and the windows. He was unconscious, with blood coming out of his nostrils. His cigarette, put down on the edge of the desk, was now scorching the mahogany with an acrid smell. The desk-chair and a little table had been overturned.

"There was a stain on the thick grey carpet where his glass had been upset," Iris continued, "together with a stoppered decanter which had not spilt, and a siphon enclosed in metal crossbands. Seton was moaning. When we turned him over on his side we found the weapon.

"It was that hollow wooden thing with lead inside," said Iris. She saw it as vividly as though it lay on the carpet now. "Only six or seven inches long, but it weighed nearly a pound. Harold, who'd started to study medicine once, put his fingers down and felt round the back of Mr. Seton's head. Then he said I'd better hurry and phone for a proper doctor.

"I had backed away against the windows—I remember that. The curtains weren't quite drawn. I could hear the rain hitting the window behind me. I looked round, because I was afraid there might be somebody hiding in the curtains. We pulled the curtains back on

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both windows. Then we saw the edge of the ladder. It had been propped up against the right-hand window, from the garden below. And I noticed something else that I'll swear to, and go on swearing to until you believe me. But never mind what it was, for a minute.

" I ran out to phone for Dr. Woodhall, but it wasn't necessary. I met him coming up the stairs in the front hall."

There were several things she did not tell here.

She did not say how heartening it was to see Dr. Woodhall's shrewd, humorous face looking at her from under the brim of a sodden hat. He wore a dripping mackintosh with the collar turned up, and carried his medicine-case.

" I don't know how he got in," Iris went on. " Mr. Seton had dismissed the servants after dinner. The front door must have been unlocked. Anyway, he said, ' Hullo ; is anything wrong ? ' I think I said, ' Come up quickly ; something terrible has happened.'

" He didn't make any comment. But when he had examined Mr. Seton he said it was concussion of the brain all right, from several powerful blows. I asked whether I should phone for an ambulance. He said Mr. Seton wasn't in shape to be moved, and that we should have to get him to bed in the house.

" When we were carrying him into his bedroom, things started to fall out of his pockets. The key to the safe wasn't there : it had been torn loose from the other end of his watch-chain. And he kept on moaning.

" You know the rest. The safe had been robbed, not only of the money, but of two valuable folios. Apparently it was all plain sailing. There was the ladder propped against the window-sill outside. There were scuffed footprints in a flower-bed below. It was a burglar. It must have been a burglar. Only—" She paused, clearing her throat. " Only," she went on, " *both those windows were locked on the inside.*"

Dr. Fell grunted.

Something in this recital had interested him very much. He drew in several of his chins, and exchanged a glance with Superintendent Hadley.

" Both the windows," he rumbled, " were locked on the inside. You're quite sure of that ? Hey ? "

" I'm absolutely positive."

" You couldn't have been mistaken ? "

" I only wish I could have," said Iris helplessly. " And you know what they think, don't you ? They think Harold and I caught him and beat his head in.

" It's so awfully easy to think that. Harold and I were alone in the house. We were sitting outside the only door to the study. There was no intruder anywhere. Both the study windows were

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locked on the inside. It—well, it just couldn't have been anybody else but us. Only it wasn't. That's all I can tell you."

Dr. Fell opened his eyes.

"But, my dear young lady," he protested, blowing sparks from his cigar like a spirit of the volcano, "whatever else they think about you, I presume they don't think you are raving mad? Suppose you had faked this burglary? Suppose you had planted the ladder against the window? Would you and Mills then go about swearing the windows were locked in order to prove that your story couldn't be true?"

"Just a moment," said Superintendent Hadley sharply.

Hadley was beaten, and he knew it. But he was fair.

"I'll be frank with you, Miss Lane," he went on. "Before you came in, I was telling Dr. Fell that Mr. Seton is conscious. He's talked to me. And—"

"And?"

"Mr. Seton," said Hadley, "confirms your story in every detail. He clears you and Mills of any complicity in the crime."

Iris said nothing. All the same, they saw her face grow white under its tan.

"He says," pursued Hadley, in the midst of a vast silence, "that he was sitting at his desk, facing the door to the library. He swears he could hear you and Mills talking in the library. His back, of course, was towards the windows. He agrees that the windows were locked, since he had just locked them himself. At a few minutes past eleven, he heard a footstep behind him. A 'shuffling' footstep. Just as he started to get up, something smashed him across the head, and that's all he remembers. So it seems you were telling the truth."

"H'mf," said Dr. Fell.

Iris stared at Hadley. "Then I'm not—you're not going to arrest me?"

"Frankly," snapped the superintendent, "no. I'm sorry to say I don't see how we can arrest anybody. The windows were locked. The door was watched. There was nobody hidden in the room. Yet someone, by the victim's own testimony, did get in and cosh Seton. We've got a blooming miracle, that's what we've got; and, if you don't believe me, come along and talk to Seton for yourself."

Francis Seton lived, and nearly died, in the grand manner. His bedroom was furnished in the heavy, dark and florid style of the Second French Empire, with a four-poster bed. He lay propped up with his neck above the pillows, glowering out of a helmet of bandages.

"Time's nearly up," warned Dr. Charles Woodhall, who stood

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at one side of the bed. His fingers were on Seton's wrist, but Seton snatched the wrist away.

Superintendent Hadley was patient.

"What I'm trying to get at, Mr. Seton, is this. When did you lock those two windows?"

"Told you that already," said Seton. "About ten minutes before that fellow sneaked up and hit me."

"But you didn't catch a glimpse of the person who hit you?"

"No, worse luck. Or I'd have—"

"Yes. But *why* did you lock the windows?"

"Because I'd noticed the ladder outside. Couldn't have burglars getting in, could I?"

"You didn't try to find out who put the ladder there?"

"No. I couldn't be bothered."

"At the same time, you were a little nervous?"

For some time Iris Lane had the impression that Seton, if it were not for his injury, would have rolled over on his side, buried his face in the pillows, and groaned with impatience. But the last question stung him to wrath.

"Who says I was nervous? Nervous! I'm the last man in the world to be nervous. I haven't got a nerve in my body." He appealed to Dr. Woodhall and to Harold Mills. "Have I?"

"You've got an exceptionally strong constitution," replied Dr. Woodhall blandly.

Seton appeared to scent evasion here. His bloodshot eyes rolled, without a turn of his neck, from Woodhall to Mills; but they came back to Hadley.

"Well? Anything else you want to know?"

"Just one more question, Mr. Seton. Are you sure there was nobody hidden in the study or the cloakroom before you were attacked?"

"Dead certain."

Hadley shut up his notebook. "Then that's all, sir. Nobody hidden, before or after. Windows locked, before and after. I don't believe in ghosts, and so the thing's impossible." He spoke quietly. "Excuse me, Mr. Seton, but are you sure you were attacked after all?"

"And excuse *me*," interrupted a new voice, thunderous but apologetic.

Dr. Fell, whose presence was somewhat less conspicuous than a captive balloon, had not removed his disreputable slouch hat: a breach of good manners which ordinarily he would have deplored. But his manner had a vast eagerness, like Old King Cole in a hurry. Iris Lane could not remember having seen him for some minutes. He lumbered in at the doorway, with one hand holding an object

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wrapped in newspaper and the other supporting himself on his crutch-handled stick.

"Sir," he intoned, addressing Seton, "I should regret it very much if my friend Hadley gave you an apoplectic stroke. It is therefore only fair to tell you that you were attacked, and very thoroughly battered about the head, by one of the persons in this room. I am also glad the police have kept your study locked up since then."

There was a silence as sudden as that which follows a loud noise. From the newspaper Dr. Fell took out a soda-water siphon, and put it down with a thump on the centre table. It was a large siphon, bound round with metal bands in a diamond design.

And Dr. Fell reared up.

"Dash it, Hadley," he complained, "why couldn't you have told me about the siphon? Ten days in a spiritual abyss; and all because you couldn't tell me about the siphon! It took the young lady to do that."

"But I did tell you about a siphon," said Hadley. "I've told you about it a dozen times!"

"No, no, no," insisted Dr. Fell dismally. "You said 'a' siphon. Presumably an ordinary siphon, the unending white bulwark of the English pub. You didn't say it was this particular kind of siphon."

"But what the devil has the siphon got to do with it anyway?" demanded Hadley. "Mr. Seton wasn't knocked out with a siphon."

"Oh, yes, he was," said Dr. Fell.

It was so quiet that they could hear a fly buzzing against one half-open window.

"You see," continued Dr. Fell, fiery with earnestness, "the ordinary siphon is of plain glass. It doesn't have these criss-cross metal bands, or that nickelled cap at the other side of the nozzle. In short, this is a 'Fountain-fill' siphon; the sort which you fill yourself with plain water, and turn into soda-water by means of compressed-air capsules."

Enlightenment came to Superintendent Hadley.

"Ah!" chortled Dr. Fell. "Got it, have you? The police, as a matter of ordinary routine, would closely examine the dregs of a whisky-glass or any decanter found at the scene of a crime. But they would never think twice about a siphon, because the ordinary soda-water siphon can't possibly be tampered with. And yet, by thunder, *this* one could be tampered with!"

Dr. Fell sniffed. He lumbered over to the bedside table, and picked up a tumbler. Returning with it to the centre table, he squirted some of the soda into the glass. He touched his tongue to it.

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"I think, Mr. Harold Mills," he said, "you had better give yourself up for theft and attempted murder."

Dr. Fell chuckled as he sat in his own library at Chelsea.

"And you still don't see it?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Dr. Woodhall.

"No," cried Iris Lane.

"The whole trick," their host went on, "turns on the fact that the 'Mickey Finn' variety of knock-out drops produces on the victim exactly the same sensation as being struck over the head: the sudden bursting explosion of pain, the roaring in the ears, and almost instant unconsciousness.

"Mills had a dozen opportunities that day to load the 'Fountain-fill' siphon with the drug. He knew, as you all knew, exactly when Francis Seton would drink his one whisky-and-soda of the day. Mills had already removed what he wanted from the safe. Finally, he had propped up a ladder outside the study window to make the crime seem the work of a burglar. All he had to do then was to wait for eleven o'clock.

"At eleven o'clock Seton drank the hocussed mixture, cried out, and fell, knocking over a number of objects on the carpet. Since the whole effect of this drug depends on a violent cerebral rush of blood, a man already suffering from high blood-pressure would be likely and even certain to bleed from the nostrils. It provided the last realistic touch."

Dr. Fell growled to himself, no longer seeming quite so cherubic. Then he looked at Iris. "Mills," he went on, "deliberately fiddled with the door, pretending it was stuck: which it was not. He wanted to allow time for the imaginary burglar to loot the safe. Then he ran in with you. When he turned Seton over, he took that piece of lead-filled broom handle out of his sleeve, slipped it under the body, and dramatically called your attention to it.

"Next, you remember, he felt at the base of Seton's skull in pretended horror, and told you to go out and phone for a doctor. As a result of this, you also recall, he was for several minutes completely alone in the study."

Iris was looking at the past, examining each move she herself had made.

"You mean," she muttered, "that was when he—?" She brought up her arm in the gesture of one using a life-preserver.

"Yes," said Dr. Fell. "That was when he deliberately struck several blows on the head of an unconscious man to complete his plan.

"He removed the key to the safe from Seton's watch-chain. In case the police should be suspicious of any drinks found at the

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scene of a crime, he rinsed out the spilled whisky-glass in that convenient cloakroom, and poured into the glass a few drops of harmless whisky from the decanter. He had no time to refill and recharge the siphon before you and Dr. Woodhall returned to the study; so he left it alone. A handkerchief round his hand prevented any fingerprints. Unfortunately, mischance tripped him up with a resounding wallop." Dr. Woodhall nodded.

"You mean," he said, "that Seton had noticed the ladder, and locked the windows?"

"Yes. And the unfortunate Mr. Mills didn't discover the locked windows until it was too late. Miss Lane, as you have probably discovered, is a very positive young lady. She looked at the windows. She knew they were locked. She was prepared to swear it in any court. So Mills, floundering and drifting and never very determined except where it came to appropriating someone else's property, had to keep quiet. He could not even get at that betraying siphon afterwards, because the police kept the room locked.

"He had one bit of luck, though. Francis Seton, of course, heard no footsteps behind him before the attack. Anybody who takes one look at the thick carpet of the study cannot fail to be convinced of that. I wondered whether the good Mr. Seton might be deliberately lying. But a little talk with Seton will show you the real reason. The man's boasted vitality is killing him: it has got him into such a state of nerves that he really does need a year in California. Once he saw that ladder outside the window, once he began to think of burglars, he was ready to imagine anything."

Iris was glancing sideways at Dr. Woodhall. Woodhall, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, was glancing sideways at her.

"I—er—I don't like to bring it up," said Iris. "But—"

"Mills's proposal?" inquired Dr. Fell affably.

"Well, yes."

"My dear young lady," intoned Dr. Fell, with all the gallantry of a load of bricks falling through a skylight, "there you mention the one point at which Mills really showed good taste. Discernment. *Raffinement.* It also probably occurred to him that a criminal who proposes marriage places the lady in a blind-eyed and sympathetic mood if the criminal should happen to make a slip in his game afterwards. But can you honestly say you are sorry it was Mills they took away in the Black Maria?"

Iris and Dr. Woodhall were not even listening.

* * *

Don't trust first impulses—they are always good.

CHARLES DE TALLEYRAND

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UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

Who loves to lie with me . . .

The greenfinch in the hawthorn yonder has been there since I came out, and all the time has been happily talking to his love. He has left the hawthorn indeed, but only for a minute or two, to fetch a few seeds, and comes back each time more full of song-talk than ever. He notes no slow movement of the oak's shadow on the grass ; it is nothing to him and his lady dear . . . all their thoughts are in their song-talk. The sunny moment is to them all in all. So deeply are they rapt in it that they do not know whether it is for a moment or a year. There is no clock for feeling, for joy, for love.

RICHARD JEFFERIES, *The Life of the Fields*

Constellation

Through the forest of white damson trees with the constellations of sharp and of soft flower-stars and of dew falling upon their hair and brushing their lips, with the oceans of flower-smells and of light lapping about them, two young people were walking hand in hand. The airs were green among the branches, and you felt that the forest stretched for ever, far beyond the spring and the songs of birds.

" Aldebaran, Sirius, Cassiopeia, falling from the branches," he said, and put out his hand to catch them as they fell. Beyond, stretching far into the distance, were the flowering cherry trees, with their laughing, dazzling, sweet snows, not cold to touch, but warm with life and the promise of future fires.

" How sad it is," she sighed, looking at the landscape of snows and of planetary systems, all dancing to the unheard music, " To think that they must grow old."

" They will be young again next spring," the young man said ; " and even if they should fade, I should always see your hand waving to me through the branches."

" Sometimes you seem to me like a ghost. I expect you to fade in the light. But then, if you did, I should find the spring was a ghost too."

" Oh," he replied, laughing at her through the branches, " you will not find I shall fade as quickly as that. And if I should turn into a ghost, it would be your fault."

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"It would not be my fault if the spring should fade."

"See! I will give you a bouquet of clear dancing stars, I will give you the planetary system, and you can wear it in your hair, or tread it under your feet, for I will pluck it down from the sky for you. Look!"—and he held up a branch with the white flowers growing thick upon it. "It seems as if it were shaking with laughter. Perhaps it is laughing at the follies of the world . . ."

EDITH SITWELL, *I Live Under a Black Sun*

Summum Bonum

I cling and swing
On a branch, or sing
Through the cool, clear hush of morning, O :
Or fling my wing
On the air, and bring
To sleepier birds a warning, O :
That the night's in flight,
And the sun's in sight,
And the dew is the grass adorning, O :
And the green leaves swing
As I sing, sing, sing,
Up by the river,
Down the dell,
To the little wee nest
Where the big tree fell,
So early in the morning, O.

I flit and twit
In the sun for a bit
When his light so bright is shining, O :
Or sit and fit
My plumes, or knit
Straw plaits for the nest's nice lining, O :
And she with glee
Shows unto me
Underneath her wings reclining, O :
And I sing that Peg
Has an egg, egg, egg,
Up by the oat-field,
Round the mill
Past the meadow
Down the hill,
So early in the morning, O . . .

JAMES STEPHENS, *Fifteen Acres*

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Primrose Path

The woods are green with branches
And sweet with nightingales,
With gold and blue and scarlet
Are flowered all the dales.

Sweet it is to wander
In a place of trees,
Sweeter to pluck roses
And the fleur-de-lys,
But dalliance with a lovely lass
Far surpasseth these . . .

MS. of Benedictbeuern,
translated by HELEN WADDELL

Beside the Lake, beneath the Trees . . .

Small feathers of golden clouds drifted across a sky the colour of a thrush's egg. Down by the lake the daffodils were now in their plenty; the only ripple on the water came in rings from a leaping fish; a moorhen croaked, invisible. Walter was grateful to Juliet for making no comment.

"Let us go and sit in the grotto," she said.

They went by the path round the edge of the lake and came to the grotto, a dripping, ferny cave of rocaille, inhabited by the statue of a pensive nymph, dipping one foot into a great shell of water. She held her few draperies to her breast, in a modest gesture.

"I love the nymph," said Juliet, putting her finger-tips on to the bare shoulder.

"She is rather like you," said Walter, who had often thought so.

V. SACKVILLE-WEST, *The Easter Party*

A-Maying

God ripe the wines and corn, I say,
And wenches for the marriage-day,
And boys to teach love's comely play.
By Goddés fay, by Goddés fay!
It is the month, the jolly month,
It is the jolly month of May . . .

FRANCIS THOMPSON, *A May Burden*

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TUNE OF LOVE

His only compensating thought was that he would make her something very nice

by H. E. BATES

EVERY Sunday evening in summertime she sat at the front window and watched until he came up the hill. Her hands on the horsehair rests of the chair were like pieces of stone-grey paper painted with thin lines of water-colour, palest blue, the skin transparent and the fingers crabbed over the little palms. She always wore a straw hat that had once evidently been purple with black trimmings, but now there were no trimmings: only the shadows of the trimmings, dark grey, on the mildew grey of the faded, remaining straw.

She sat surrounded by a mass of greenery in brass and china pots, set about on bamboo stands. The curtains in the big bay window were like blankets of red chenille bearing fruitings of soft bobbles down the sides. The old-fashioned gas-brackets over the mantelshelf bore opaque globes of pink and under them were ornaments of twisted yellow glass from which sprouted dead stalks of feathery brown reed and bunches of paper spills. She made the spills for Luther, with her own hands, every Saturday.

Whenever he came round the corner of the long steep hill she always thought that he looked, in his black suit and carrying the black fiddle-case, so much like a doctor. Even from that distance the big rough-angled body dwarfed the fiddle-case so that it did not look much larger than a doctor's bag. She had in mind particularly Dr. Farquharson's bag because it was the bag she had known best. It had brought her the twelve children, beginning with Luther.

The illusion of bag and doctor remained with her through his journey up the hill. He walked with a slight groping roll, big feet splayed out as if he wanted to grip the hill with his toes. She knew he did not roll like that because he was drunk but only because his feet were bad. His feet had always been bad. They had been bad ever since the time he was a child and had grown so fast that she could never afford to buy shoes to catch up with him. In those days he had had to suffer a lot of things in that way because he was the first and times were desperate. She felt keenly that she had never been able to do her best for him. The others had been luckier.

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When he came into the room at last it was always with a series of bungling noisy clashes as he tried to find a resting-place for the fiddle-case somewhere among the many little tables, the piano, the bookcase and the chairs. He could never find room for the damn fiddle. The bookcase and the piano were locked up, polished as glass, and she kept the keys on a chain. He groped among the chairs with bull-like stupor but she never at any time took a great deal of notice of it. He had always been clumsy on his feet. He had been a day or two short of nineteen months before he had started walking at all. She always remembered that, being so afraid that he would never walk: an awful thing, to have a child so fragile that it never walked.

If she was aware of feeling that the enormous body still enshrined the fragile child she did not reveal it. She turned on him with little grunts of peevish affection that had no effect on him at all.

"It'll be dark before you get up here one of these days."

"Had a rush job on. Wonder I got finished at all."

When he had at last disposed of the fiddle he liked to sit by the piano, in the dark patch caused by one end, so that she could not see his face.

"Who was it?" she said. "Thought you said trade was bad."

"So it is. Man in Canal Street. Burying tomorrow."

"Who's he? What name?"

"Johnson. Call him Polly Johnson. Kin to Liz Johnson—"

"Nobody I know."

The lines of her face would crease themselves in deeper ruts of disapprobation. Her mouth would go on muttering without sound for some moments longer while he settled himself by the piano with hot discomfort and perhaps a belch or two.

"You can take your coat off."

She liked him better with his coat off. It reminded her of the Sundays when all of them were at home, at dinner, all the little boys with clean white aprons on, so that the gravy from the Yorkshire pudding did not drop on their chapel suits.

The absence of the coat revealed a man of gross, crusty width, with watery blue eyes starting beerily from a face fired by summer to lines of smouldering bruisy red. His collar-stud pressed brassily on his thick throat and his shirt-sleeves were rolled up above arms massive and blackly haired.

His voice had a yeasty thickness: "All of 'em gone chapel?"

"Rose and Clarice and Will have gone. Lawrence and Nell went this morning." Lawrence and Will were good boys: steady boys, fellows with enough ambition to get good jobs and enough sense to hang on to them when they got them. They were solid, pin-stripe men. She had never had any bother with Will and

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Lawrence; they never troubled her. They did not approve of Luther, but then, they did not understand him.

"Ain't bin out nowhere this week, I reckon? Too hot for you."

"Went up to Rose's Thursday," she said.

"Git the bus?"

"Bus! What d'ya think my legs are for?"

"You wanta git the bus," he said. "One o' these days you'll be doing that traipse up there once too much and you'll be dropping down."

"If I do you'll be there measuring me out 'fore I'm cold," she said swiftly, "I'll warrant that."

"Ah, don't sit there horse-facing so much. You horse-face too much by half."

"Don't you tell me I horse-face," she said.

He did not answer. It pained him when she horse-faced at him. He dreaded the day when he would be measuring her out, he thought. His only compensating thought about that was that he would make her something very nice; something really high-class and lovely; something fitting and worthy of the old lady.

She sat there for some time looking like a bone carving, and at last he broke the silence by saying:

"Anything to eat? I could do with a mite o' something."

"I'll be bound you never got your dinner again, did you?"

"Never had time. Bin at it since daylight."

"Funny how you get so many jobs a-Sundays," she said and her nose rose, pointed as a bird's.

Then because he sat there without moving for a second or two longer she said: "Well: you know where the pantry is. You don't expect me to put it in your mouth for you, do you?"

Daylight was fading a little when he came lumbering back into the room with hunks of jam tart and cheese and bread and cold new potatoes and a slice of cold Yorkshire pudding on a plate. He sat with the plate on his knees. He knew that he had to be careful of the crumbs; he knew she would horse-face if he dropped the crumbs.

But the taste of the new potatoes and the cold Yorkshire pudding were the taste of all the summer Sunday evenings of his boyhood and he crammed them in with blind-eyed pleasure, bolting them down, licking thick red lips and wishing to God she had a pint in the house to wash them down.

She muttered at last: "Anybody'd think you'd never had a mite in your life. Don't she ever get you nothing a-Sundays?"

"Never care whether I get much a-Sundays," he said.

"It don't look like it," she said.

That was the worst of his mother, he thought. She couldn't hit

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it off with Edna. He had given up trying to make her now. It was like trying to turn a mule.

"You can get yourself a spill when you want one," she said.

Edna was a bit easy-going, he knew, but on the whole he didn't complain. She had let herself go a bit, perhaps, after the last baby. She was a bit sloppy round the middle. Her face was nothing much to write home about but then he wasn't a picture either.

The chief thing was she didn't nag him; he really didn't get drunk very much and if he was late at the Unicorn on a Sunday she and the children ate the dinner without him and he pacified her with a pint of stout afterwards.

By the time he had finished eating it was almost dark and he got up and did the thing he always did, without fail, every Sunday. He lit one of the gas-lamps above the mantelshelf and then, holding his big red face under the light, adjusted the burner until it gave a pure white glow.

Then he filled his pipe and lit one of her paper spills from the gas-mantle and put it to his pipe. The flame was sucked down by his red powerful mouth into the pipe bowl until at last he blew out strong blue clouds of smoke that almost smothered him.

As she sat in the window she let the smoke come over to her with her head slightly uplifted, as if it were a cool breeze blowing through the warm airless room in which no window had been open all day.

There were three moments she really waited for all evening, and this was the second of them. The first was when she saw him turn, so like a doctor with the fiddle-case, at the bottom of the hill. The second was the moment of the gas-lamp, the pure white glow on his face, the great sucked-down flame and the smoke puttering across the room in blue string clouds. It was the smoke above all that she associated with that clumsy massiveness of his and after she smelled it she was aware of the slow dying of cantankerousness inside herself, a softening of all the edges of the day. When the pipe was really going she knew what he would do next. She began unconsciously to finger the keys that hung on the chain round her neck —the keys of the piano and the bookcase. That was the third moment: the moment when he reached for the fiddle-case and undid it and opened it and took out the bow.

He had begun to play the fiddle when he was seven years old. That had been her ambition for him: a fiddler, a violinist, a great player of the violin in the household. Mr. Godbold, who had been a fiddler himself in a great orchestra in Leicester or Birmingham or some other big city up in that part of the world, gave him lessons in his front room, twice a week, after school, at two shillings a time.

"He has fine hands," Mr. Godbold said. "He will make a fine

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player. He is slow but in the end he will make a fine player."

The walls of Mr. Godbold's front room were hung with many pictures of Mr. Godbold playing the violin as a soloist or in orchestras or at social evenings and smoking concerts. She considered that Mr. Godbold, in pieces like the *Spring Song* and excerpts from *Maritana* and *Il Trovatore*, played like an angel, and she thought it would be wonderful if Luther could rise as far as that. The first winter he persevered through many exercises and the second winter he came to his first piece, *Robin Adair*.

Most children who learned the piano or the violin went to a Miss Scholes, in the High Street, where they learned *The Bluebells of Scotland* as their first piece and Miss Scholes gave them sixpence for doing so. Mr. Godbold did not believe in bribing his pupils; they worked hard on exercises that were the real foundation of music and then went straight on to pieces like *Robin Adair*.

Luther stuck at *Robin Adair*. He played it through for a whole winter and then his hands began to grow. By the time he was twelve he was a big awkward gargoyle of a boy in whose hands the violin looked effete and fragile. She thought by that time he could play beautifully: perhaps not quite as beautifully as Mr. Godbold. Perhaps it only seemed to her almost as beautiful because he was so very young.

"You want the key?" she said. She took it off the chain and held it out to him.

The sound of the fifths as he spaced them out on the piano was, she thought, a most wonderful thing. It was different from anything else that was ever heard on the piano: those queer, sharp steps of notes climbing up and starting a trembling on the air. That was the true violin sound: that wonderful prelude of quivering that drew out finally into the glassy, soaring, singing of strings.

She had never been very happy about his being a carpenter and at first she opposed it. It was probably that, she thought, that had made his hands so large and clumsy. She was certain the hands of a carpenter could not also be the hands of a violinist; the one could only ruin the other. But his father had said a man had his living to earn and what was wrong with being a carpenter? "There was One who was a carpenter and there was no shame in that," he said.

"Play y' th' old un?" Luther said, but she said nothing because she knew he never began with any other.

The time he took to play through *Robin Adair* always seemed to go by, perhaps because she shut her eyes, very quickly. It flew away on the song's own delicacy. He liked to play too with the pipe in his mouth, so that every scrape of the bow gave out its own rank cloud of smoke that finally choked the room with gas-green fog.

After *Robin Adair* he played several other pieces: *The Jolly*

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Miller and *Oh, Dear! What Can the Matter Be?* She thought he played better as he got older; but that, after all, was only natural. That was only as it should be. He was over fifty now. He had been playing the same pieces, on the same violin, for forty years.

"Gittin' dark," Luther would say, after the third piece. "Better be gittin' steady on home."

He sat with the fiddle-case on his knee and the pipe and the violin in his right hand, waiting to pack up. There would be just time, he thought, to nip into the Unicorn and have a couple of beers, perhaps even three or four beers, before they closed at half-past ten. Old Shady Parker would be there and Bill Flawn and Tom Jaques and Flannel Clarke and they would stand each other a round or two. That would rouse him up nicely and he would go home to Edna happy, belching through the dark summer streets, up and down the hills.

Tomorrow he would begin to cut out another coffin. Trade was never what you called good in the summer but someone was always going, unexpected or not, and he mucked along somehow. Damn what the family said. That was good enough for him.

"Better put the key back afore you forgit," he would say and she would take the key from him and clip it back on the chain.

The poise of her hands, held for a second or two about her throat, was a signal that she gave him every Sunday.

"Want me to gie y' another?"

"Have you got time? Don't you hang about if you haven't got time." "Plenty o' time." The big voice was crude and massive as the hands. "You jes' say and I'll play it. Want another? What's it goin' a-be?"

"Play me the old one," she would say.

The old one was *Robin Adair*. As he played it she stared beyond the smoky gaslight into spaces empty of shape. She sat ageless and tranquil as if already embalmed among the greenery of fern-pots, before a shroud of blanketing curtains, under a gas-blue summer sky. The harsh sound of the fiddle-strings drew out thinner and thinner across the spaces into which she was staring until her eyes went cloudily after them and she was sightless as she listened. "Ah! y' can't beat th' old uns," Luther said. "They take a bit o' beatin'."

She did not answer. She felt always that she could hear the sound of the strings long after they were silent. They were like the sound of pigeons' voices echoing each other far away in summer trees, and in the sound of them was all her love.

* * *

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DELIVERANCE

"Stay awake to be assassinated?" she muttered to her pillow, and laughed

by REBECCA WEST

ONE autumn evening a woman in her early forties walked along the platform of the Terminal Station in Rome and boarded a wagon-lit coach in the Paris express. She sat down on the made-up bed in her compartment, took off her small, perfect, inconspicuous hat, and looked about her with an air of annoyance.

It was a long time since she had travelled by rail, and she had been pushed into it against her will, because there had not been a seat free on any of the planes leaving Rome that day or the next. But that was the least of her worries, and she wasted no time on it, but set about arranging her passport and her tickets in order to have them ready when the wagon-lit attendant arrived.

This required close scrutiny, for although she was a Frenchwoman named Madame Rémy, another impression was conveyed by her passport, her tickets, and the labels on her luggage, and she had to remind herself what that impression was, for only a few hours before she had been yet a third person.

Such inconsistencies, however, never made her nervous. They were unlikely to be noticed because she herself was so unnoticeable. She was neither tall nor short, dark nor fair, handsome nor ugly. She left a pleasant impression on those she met in her quiet passage through the world, and then they forgot her. She had no remarkable attributes except some which were without outward sign, such as a command of six languages and an unusually good memory.

When the door opened Madame Rémy had not quite finished getting her papers out of a handbag which had more than the usual number of pockets and flaps in it and some very intricate fastenings. Without raising her head, she asked the attendant to wait a moment, in her excellent Italian, which, just for verisimilitude, had a slight Florentine accent. Then, as he did not answer, she looked up sharply.

She had only time to remark that he was wearing not the uniform of a wagon-lit attendant, but a dark grey suit with a checked blue muffler, and that his pale face was shining with sweat. Then the door banged between them.

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She did not follow him, because she was as highly disciplined as any soldier, and she knew that her first concern must be with the tiny ball of paper which he had dropped in her lap.

When she had unrolled it she read a typewritten message: "*A man is travelling on this train under orders to kill you.*" She rolled it up again and went into the corridor and stood there, looking out at the crowds on the ill-lit platform. It would have been unwise to leave the train. A clever man with a knife, she calculated, could do his work among the shadows and get away quite easily. Several times she had to step back into her compartment, to get out of the way of passengers who were coming aboard, and at these, if they were male, she looked with some interest.

She was standing thus, looking up at a tall man in a tweed overcoat with a non-committal glance, neither too blank nor too keenly interested, and wondering if he were so tall as to be specially memorable and therefore ineligible as an assassin, when she heard shouts from the platform.

The tall man came to a halt, and she crushed past him and stood beside him, looking out through the wide corridor window at a scene as still as a painted picture.

Everybody was motionless, even the porters with their luggage-barrows, while four men made their way back to the platform gates, at a quiet and steady pace, two in front, and two behind who were walking backwards. Their faces were darkened by masks, and all held revolvers, which they pointed at the crowd.

The man beside Madame Rémy made a scandalized and bluff noise which told her that he was not an assassin, and at that moment the train began to move. He went on his way to his compartment and left Madame Rémy standing alone at the window, waiting to see what had happened at the end of the platform. But she saw nothing unusual till the train was leaving the station behind it and sliding out into the open evening. Then her eye was caught by the last iron pillar that held up the platform roof.

A man was embracing it as if it were a beloved woman to whom he was bidding farewell. His suit was dark grey; and as he slid to the ground and toppled and fell face upwards, it could be seen that he was wearing a checked blue muffler.

Madame Rémy went back to her compartment and said a prayer for his soul. She looked at her hands with some distaste, because they were shaking, and took the little ball of paper out of her bag and read the message again. This was not because she feared she had forgotten it, or thought she had overlooked any of its implications, but because it interested her as a technician to see if there were any distinguishing marks in the typefaces which recalled any typed letters that she had received before. Then she thought of all

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the things it would be sensible to do, such as ringing for the attendant and showing him the message, out in the corridor, in front of some open door, in the hearing of some other passenger, preferably a woman, and she decided to do none of them.

She said aloud, " I am a lucky woman." Leaning back her head against the cushions she repeated, " How very lucky I am."

There had seemed no way out of the wretchedness that was all around her. She was under no illusion as to the reason why the doctor she had consulted in Rome concerning a slight but persistent symptom had begged her to go into hospital for an X-ray examination the next day, and had urged her, when he found she was resolved to go back to Paris, not to let one day pass after she got there without seeking a surgeon. The thing was in her father's family and she was familiar with its method of approach.

She was, moreover, in financial difficulties to which there could be no end. She had loved her dead husband very much, so much that she felt that she could deny nothing to the child of his first marriage. But Madeleine was sullen and unaffectionate, had early insisted on marrying a worthless young man and had three children already and might have more ; and her only remarkable characteristic was a capacity for getting into debt without having anything to show for it in purchased goods.

Madame Rémy did not see how she could meet this last crop of bills without selling either the few jewels remaining to her, which she wore so constantly, except when she was on duty, that they seemed part of her body, or her little house in Passy, where she had spent all her married life. In either case it would be a joyless sacrifice, for Madeleine had nothing of her father in her.

Also, it was evident to Madame Rémy that her long-standing friendship with Henri was over. Just before she left Paris she had heard again the rumour that he was going to marry the American heiress, and his denial had left her in no doubt that they were going to part before very long, perhaps even without tenderness. That would take from the last five years of her life the value which she had believed made them remarkable.

She had always thought that she had taken up her peculiar work because she and a distinguished member of the French Foreign Office had fallen in love with each other, and that had made it a romantic adventure. But now she suspected that a member of the French Foreign Office had had a love affair with her because she had an aptitude for a certain peculiar kind of work ; and though she recognized that even if this were so, Henri had formed some real affection for her and that she owed him gratitude for much charming companionship, she knew that she would never be able to look

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back on their relations without a sense of humiliation. Even her work, in which she had hoped to find her main interest as her life went on, would now be darkened in her mind by association with a long pretence, and her own gullibility.

There was nothing at the end of her journey except several sorts of pain, so if the journey had no end there was no reason for grief.

When she had worked it out to her final satisfaction she found that the wagon-lit attendant was standing in front of her, asking for her tickets and passport. She gave them to him slowly, feeling a certain sense of luxury, because his presence meant her last hope of life, and she was not taking it.

They wished each other good night, and then she called him back, because it had occurred to her that it would be unfair if he had to go without his tip in the morning just because she was dead. Agents were trained never to make themselves memorable by giving more or less than the standard tip, and she acted according to habit, but regretted it, for the occasion called for a little lavishness.

As she explained to him that she was giving him the tip in case they were rushed at the other end of the journey, she noted his casual air. He was evidently to be the second last man she was to see, not the last.

Once she was alone she burned the message in her wash-basin, and pulled up the window-blind so that she could look at the bright villages and the dark countryside that raced by. She thought of the smell of anaesthetics that hangs about the vestibules of clinics; and she thought of the last time she had met Madame Couthier in the Champs Elysées and how Madame Couthier had looked through her as if they had never been at school together, and how it had turned out that Madeleine had run up a huge bill with young Couthier, who was finding it hard to make his way as an interior decorator.

She thought of an evening, just before she had heard the rumour about the American heiress, when Henri had driven her back from dinner at Ville d'Auray, and she had rested her head against his shoulder for a minute when the road was dark, and had kissed his sleeve. Henri and she were the same age, yet she felt hot with shame when she remembered this, as if she had been an old woman doting on a boy.

She pulled down the blind, and began to make very careful preparations for the night. Her large case was on the rack, and she did not care to ring for the attendant and ask him to move it for her, lest somebody else should come in his stead and the attack be precipitated before she was ready for it. But she was obliged to get it down, because she had packed in it her best nightgown,

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which was made of pleated white chiffon. For a reason she had never understood she had always liked to carry it with her when she went on a specially dangerous enterprise ; and now she saw that it had been a sensible thing to do. It was very pleasant to put it on after she had undressed and washed very carefully, rubbing herself down with toilet water as she could not have a bath.

After she had made up her face again and recoiffed her hair she lay down between the sheets. Then it occurred to her that she had not unpacked her bedroom slippers, and she made a move to get out of bed before she realized that she need not take the trouble.

She turned out the big light in the compartment ceiling, and left on only the little reading-lamp at the head of her bed. She had not locked the door. Her careful toilette had made her tired ; and indeed she had been working very hard for some days, preparing all the papers that were now safe in her Embassy. She thought of Madeleine and Henri, and bleakly realized that she had no desire to see either of them ever again. She tried to remember something pleasant, and found that for that she had to go back to the days when her husband was alive.

It had been delightful when he came back in the evenings from his office, particularly at this very time of year, in the autumn, when he brought her sweet-smelling bouquets of bronze and gold chrysanthemums, and after tea they did not light the lamps, but sat with the firelight playing on the Japanese gilt wallpaper.

It had been delightful too when they went for holidays in Switzerland and ski-ed in winter and climbed in summer, and he always was astounded and pleased by her courage. But dear Louis was not at the end of her journey. There was nothing waiting for her there but Madeleine and Henri, and the smell that hangs about the vestibules of clinics.

The train slowed down at a station. There were cries, lurchings and trampings in the corridors, long periods of silence and immobility, a thin blast on a trumpet ; and the train jerked forward again. That happened a second time, and a third. But still the man who was travelling under orders did not come to carry them out.

Madame Rémy turned out the reading-lamp and prayed to the darkness that he might hurry ; and then for a little, retreating again from the thought of Madeleine and Henri to the memory of her husband, she passed into something nearly a dream. But she was fully awake as soon as someone tried the lock of the door with a wire. It was as if a bucket had been emptied over her, a bucket filled not with water but with fear. There was not a part of her which was not drenched with terror. She disliked this emotion, which she had never felt before except in a slight degree, just as

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much as added to the zest of an enterprise. To escape from this shuddering abasement she reminded herself that she wanted to die, and she sat up and cried, " Entrez ! Entrate !"

The door swung open, and softly closed. There followed a silence, and, feeling fear coming on her again, she switched on the light. It was a relief to her that the man who was standing with his back to the door did not wear the uniform of a wagon-lit attendant, and that he was the sort of person who would be selected for such a mission. He was young and lean and spectacled, and wore a soft hat crushed down over his brows and a loose greatcoat with the collar turned up, in a way that she tenderly noted as amateurish. It would be very hard for him to get away from the scene of a crime without arousing suspicion.

There was also a sign that he was the man for whom she was waiting in the woodenness of his features and his posture. He knew quite well that what he was doing was wrong, and to persuade himself that it was right, he had had to stop the natural flow of not only his thoughts and feelings but his muscles.

Yet he made no move to commit the violent act for which this rigidity had been a preparation. Simply he stood there, staring at her. She thought: *Poor child, he is very young*, and remained quite still, fearing to do anything which might turn him from his resolution. But he went on staring at her.

Is he never going to do it? she asked herself, wondering at the same time whether it was a cord or a knife that he was fingering in the right-hand pocket of his greatcoat.

It occurred to her that, with such a slow-moving assailant, she had still a chance of making a fight for her life and saving it. But then there came to her the look of surgical instruments on a tray, the whine that came into Madeleine's voice when she spoke of the inevitability of debt, and the fluency, which now recalled to her a conjurer's patter, of Henri's love-making; and she was conscious of the immense distance that divided her from the only real happiness she had known.

She flung open her arms in invitation to the assassin, smiling at him to assure him that she felt no ill will against him, that all she asked of him was to do his work quickly.

Suddenly he stepped backwards and withdrew. She found herself looking at the door with a stare as fixed as his own had been. She had made an absurd mistake. This was simply a fellow passenger who had mistaken the number of his compartment, and all the signs she had read in his appearance were fictions of her own mind, excited by the typewritten message.

It was a disappointment, but she did not allow it to depress her. When she thought of the man in the dark grey suit with the

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blue checked muffler, sliding down the pillar and turning over as he reached the ground, it was as a child might think of an adult who had made it a promise. She contemplated in sorrow and wonder the fact that a stranger had given up his life because he wished her well, and switched out the light and again said a prayer for him into the darkness. Then, although she had no reason to suppose that the man who was travelling under orders would not come sooner or later to carry them out, she grew drowsy.

" What, not stay awake even to be assassinated ? " she muttered to her pillow, and laughed, and was swallowed up by sleep, deep sleep, such as had often come on her at the end of a long day on the mountains, in a high hut among the snows.

The next morning a spectacled young man, wearing a soft hat and a loose greatcoat, who had left the train at Pisa and made his way back to Rome while the sun came up, stood in a hotel room and gave a disappointing report to his superior.

He said : " Madame Rémy was not on the train. It was all a mistake. There was one woman who answered to the description, and I went into her compartment, but I found she was quite a different sort of person. She looked much younger than the age you gave me, and she was very animated. She had left her door unlocked, and when she saw me she showed no fear at all.

" Indeed," he said, gloomily, " she was evidently a loose woman. Though she was in bed her face was painted, and her hair was done up as if she were going to a ball, and it was really quite extraordinary, she even stretched out her arms and smiled at me. I think," he asserted, blushing faintly, " that if I had cared to stay in her compartment I would have received quite a warm welcome."

His superior expressed an unfavourable opinion regarding the morals of all bourgeoise women, but had his doubts, and made certain enquiries. As a result the spectacled young man was doomed not to realize what was at that time his dearest ambition, for he was never given another chance to commit a political assassination. He regretted this much less than he would have owned. Even then, standing in the golden sunshine of a Roman morning, he was not really disturbed because the night had been so innocent.

At that moment Madame Rémy was sitting in the restaurant car of the Paris express, eating breakfast. She could have had it brought to her in her compartment, but she had felt a desire to have it where the windows were wider and she could see more of the countryside. Her first pot of coffee had been so good that she had ordered a second, and she was spreading the butter on a roll, smiling a little, because it seemed so absurd that after such a

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night she should have awakened to find herself suddenly freed from the wretchedness that had hung about her for so long.

Certainly she had lost none of her troubles; but they no longer appalled her. There came to mind the names of several among her friends who had survived serious operations. As for Madeleine's debts, if nobody paid them it might help the poor silly child to grow up. It might have been true that she could no longer support the desperate nature of her present work, but there was no need for her days to be idle, for the great dressmaker, Mariol, had always had a liking for her and had more than once offered her a post in his business. And there was no need for her to think of Henri. If she wanted to think of someone who was not there any more, she could remember Louis.

Some other names occurred to her: the names of people who had not survived operations. But they cast no darkness on her mind, and she was conscious only of a certain grandeur, and they went from her. For all her interest, all her vigour, was given to looking out of the window at what she was seeing again only because of some inexplicable carelessness on the part of those who were usually careful.

Now the train was running towards the mountains, and was passing through a valley in the foothills. There were cliffs, steel grey where the sun caught them, dark blue in the shadow, rising to heights patterned with the first snows, glistening sugar-white under the sharp blue sky. At the foot of the cliffs a line of poplars, golden with autumn, marked the course of a broad and shallow river racing over grey shingles; and between the river and the railway track was a field where a few cornshocks, like dried, gesticulating men, were still standing among some trailing morning mists. Across this field, through the mists, an old man in a dark blue shirt and light blue trousers was leading a red cart, drawn by two oxen the colour of the coffee and milk in her cup. Deliberately the two beasts trod, so slowly that they seemed to sleep between paces, so dutifully that if they were dreaming it must be of industry.

There was nothing very beautiful in the scene, yet it was wonderful, and it existed, it would go on being there when she was far away. As the train met the mountains and passed into a tunnel, she closed her eyes, so that she could go on seeing the cliffs and the snow and the poplars, the man and his cart and his oxen. Amazed by what the world looked like when one had thought it lost and had found it again, she sat quite still, in a trance of contentment, while the train carried her on to the end of her journey.

* * *

Tact consists in knowing how far we may go too far.

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CAT'S CRADLE

Suddenly a strange old woman appeared, wildly gesticulating

by JOHN FOOT

WATER was flooding high at the quay as Shem hauled at the gang-plank of the Ark, when suddenly a strange old woman appeared, wildly gesticulating. Shem hurried down to her, astonished to see another human being left alive ; the animals were all safely stowed away and it was time to cast off.

He asked her what was her name, and in reply she muttered something in his ear that sounded like " Pandor " or " Endor," anyhow quite foreign and most unsatisfactory, as Shem reported to his father a minute or two later.

" Ask her why she imagines we should take her along," bellowed Noah, whose temper, what with the rain getting in the flour-bin and the bears scoffing half the honey supply, was becoming a little frayed at the edges.

But the old lady only shook her head, plucked at a leather pouch that hung at her waist, babbled about being able to help when help was needed, and burst into tears.

" There, there, Mum," soothed Shem, " we'll take you along, don't you worry."

And he led her down the curving deck past the tall Giraffe stall, past the Tigers' cage and the Penguin barrel, down to the snug cabin where Mrs. Noah had a nice pot of tea ready as though the rain slashing outside was no more than a passing shower.

A shout for assistance from Ham, who was struggling with the anchor, and the old lady was forgotten in the excitement and confusion of getting under way the most important ship of all time, with its cargo of irreplaceable animal life, and virtuous humans destined to found a civilization which has, some say unfortunately, persisted right up to the present day.

For several days the Ark was buffeted by the first mad onrush of the Flood and it seemed ages before the crew sat down to a meal together and listened as Ham and Shem told of their efforts and boasted of how seaworthy the Ark had proved herself.

Japhet, who was in charge of the animals' quarters, reported that

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things were going well except for the mice who had reproduced with deadly efficiency.

"Just a family of six before the gang-plank was up, and now the family's family has arrived to eat the straw, frighten the elephants and generally make a nuisance of themselves," he explained.

But the others knew Japhet and his exaggerations. Noah told him not to take things too seriously.

"Such little animals cannot possibly be a nuisance as long as we have lions and tigers to look after them."

No more was said for some days, but then it was Noah himself who complained querulously that something would have to be done about the mice, which were keeping him awake at night with their gnawings and scuttlings.

"Do something, Japhet my boy," he grumbled. "Get the tiger to kill a few off."

But Japhet reported in the evening that the tigers refused to have anything to do with catching vermin, and that the lions, though full of good intentions, were too slow and clumsy and merely succeeded in smashing several of Mrs. Noah's precious cups. He told Shem that he had tried all the likely animals but could not find one to frighten the plague into decent restraint.

"What we want," he remarked wearily, "is a little tiger sort of an animal that could chase these so-and-sos and pounce on them."

Shem laughed.

"There's no such animal, brother; you'd better make some traps."

So Japhet thought and thought and at last invented the very first mousetrap. Just like our modern ones it was baited with cheese; and just like our modern ones Mrs. Noah put her hand in it as she felt along a dark shelf.

And what with repercussions from this incident, and the failure of the traps to stop the multiplication of the mice, it was a very woebegone Japhet who sat down to dinner the following Sunday. Noah hardly spoke to him, and the atmosphere became so strained that a break-up of this model family seemed imminent.

It was at the precise moment when Noah found a dead mouse in his soup and turned a purple face towards a trembling Japhet, that a tremulous quavering broke the silence.

"You saved my life," said the old lady to the world at large. "Now I think the time has come to repay your kindness a little."

They had forgotten all about her and everyone, even Noah with the dead mouse held daintily between finger and thumb, turned their eyes towards her.

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"In my country," she went on, "we had just such an animal as you seem to want—a little tiger that my people worshipped as a god."

She smiled a wrinkled smile and went on.

"Oh yes, indeed; and my husband, rest him, was one of the high priests."

Noah frowned most disapprovingly, but the others were so agog with interest that the old woman was not interrupted.

"He was a very great wizard and foresaw this disaster. He told me to walk fast in a certain direction, and that is how I found you. He himself stayed with our people, but at the end he gave me a wallet with certain instructions, and said I was destined to carry on the Power we worshipped."

Japhet spoke impatiently.

"But what has all this to do with the mice?"

The old lady smiled again. She took the leather pouch from her girdle with a shaky hand and unfastened the thong about its neck.

Then she took a drinking-bowl half full of water and shook some of the powder into it, muttering the while an incantation of which Japhet could catch but one phrase—

"One of powder to two of water. Work out lumps against side of basin."

Or so it sounded, mysterious and menacing, as the aged crone stirred the mixture with a forefinger.

Suddenly she stopped stirring and sat back.

"And now, my friends, I think you will see the end of your troubles."

All eyes stared at the bowl.

Nothing happened for nearly a minute.

Then, over the edge of it clambered a bedraggled furry little animal, tawny in colour and blind.

An excited babble of voices greeted it.

"Why, it's alive!" "It's just like a tiger cub, only smaller!" "A magic tiger cub from magic powder!"

And then the old lady spoke again. "No, Japhet, it's not a tiger cub. This is the animal that my people worshipped, an animal that cares for no man and fears nothing; an animal that will rid your ship of mice. In fact, it is a Cat."

And, as they watched, the kitten shook itself for, being recently reconstituted from its dehydrated form, it was growing at many times the normal speed. It sat down and blinked at them with sky-blue eyes, lifted a wavering paw, licked it with a tiny pink tongue, scraped the paw uncertainly behind its ear and began to wash itself.

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"This may be irreligious magic," thundered Noah, "but the little creature has cleaner habits than any animal aboard!"

The kitten seemed to grow as they watched and soon was lithe and sinuous and immaculately groomed. Then it stopped growing.

The old woman nodded happily.

"The Wise One was right. He was always right. Through him the Old Powers will always be here to protect us."

Tears filled her eyes as she poured a bowl of milk for the young cat, which lapped it noisily, washed itself again and yawned pointedly in the faces of the fascinated watchers; it jumped off the table, raised its tail straight up in the air and stalked across the floor.

At that moment a mouse ran out of a crack to seize a bread-crumb, ignoring the humans who had failed so hopelessly to catch its fellows. Like lightning a tawny body flashed.

The mouse lay dead.

"Bravo!" cried Noah, and Mrs. Noah clapped her hands. Japhet ran to the little cat; he stroked its back, and the animal, so wild a moment before, rubbed against his legs, purring fit to burst. From that day forward the mice were decimated and soon learned to keep to their holes; the few that survived were not troublesome. And the kitten grew into a sturdy cat, the pet of Mrs. Noah and the never-ending delight of Japhet. Everyone loved him.

Everyone, that is, except the tiger. For the tiger had felt the most awful pangs of jealousy since this miniature imitation of his own majesty had so eclipsed him, and he felt hatred for the old woman whose magic powder was the cause. He brooded in the night as he paced his cage.

One day Noah took a dove and disappeared on deck with it. When he came down to dinner that night he was smiling.

"My sons, it is nearly over," he said, and the tension of the long weeks dropped from them for they believed their father. All the humans rejoiced, whilst even the animals sensed the excitement, shook themselves and stretched happily. The rain stopped and everyone crowded on deck to gasp at the very first rainbow.

But that night the tiger, whose cage had been brought up on deck when the rain ceased, saw his chance—for the old woman was slowly hobbling round the deck in the twilight, getting a breath of fresh air before retiring; her eyesight was poor and she strayed too near the bars. The tiger's curved talons missed the old lady, but the precious wallet was ripped away, across the deck and overboard.

Screams brought Noah and his sons running on deck; they helped her to her feet and brushed her down. Tears still coursed down her wrinkled cheeks as she pointed to the wide swelling seas,

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and when they noticed that her wallet had gone the dreadful truth struck them.

One cat could not carry on the species. There would be no more cats in the world. And then the mice would be triumphant. They turned to the tiger who snarled beside his mate. "Accursed beast, it was you that should have died. This useful little animal never did you any harm."

Thus they reviled him and then, heavy with sorrow and a sense of something valuable lost for ever, they turned to go below.

But a strange sound made them pause.

It was as if a multitude of seagulls was squabbling around the ship. But only two seagulls were alive in the world, and they were down below.

"Merciful Powers," cried Noah. Strong language for him but, in this case, justified.

For he was peering into the twilight. And there, over the bulwarks, came hordes of kittens, mewing noisily with tails erect. Tabby kittens, black kittens, ginger kittens, black-and-white kittens, tortoise-shell kittens, tabby-and-white kittens, every sort of kitten imaginable; there were dozens of them, hundreds of them, noisy for milk, swerving wildly across the deck.

Noah began to laugh. They all began to laugh. Even the old woman began to cackle shrilly. But the tiger growled and bared his teeth in a snarl. He had mixed the powder and water with a vengeance.

And so the voyage ended. The gang-plank grounded firmly on the slopes of Ararat and a stream of animals—tigers, oxen, kittens, turtles, elephants and mice, poured down to dry land and hurried off to the four quarters of the globe. A bent old woman hobbled eastwards, as if she knew exactly where to go and intended to waste no time getting there.

Noah stood smiling with the satisfaction of a job well done. The Ark would make a warm home until they could build something more permanent. He stroked his fine white beard.

"I wonder," he thought as he paced towards the fire that flickered by the shore, where his family were gathered together, "I wonder what became of that dove?"

But a portly tabby cat, strolling last down the gang-plank with an eternity of worship behind him and an eternity of respect ahead, was the only one who knew the answer to that particular question.

* * *

It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being. BENJAMIN DISRAELI

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COME AND KISS ME

What harm is it to kiss, to laugh, to play?
Beauty's no blossom, if it be not used

HENRY CONSTABLE, 1562–1613

She was in an undress, reclining on a flowry bank, and diverting herself with a myrtle branch; as soon as I appear'd, she blusht, as mindful of her disappointment: Chrysis very prudently withdrew, and when we were left together, I approacht the temptation; at what time, she skreen'd my face with the myrtle, and as if there had been a wall between us, becoming more bold; "What, my chill'd spark," began she, "have you brought all yourself today?"

"Do you ask, madam," I return'd, "rather than try?" And throwing myself to her, that with open arms was eager to receive me, we kist a little age away; when giving the signal to prepare for other joys, she drew me to a more close imbrace; and now, our murmuring kisses their sweet fury tell . . .

PETRONIUS ARBITER, *1st century* A.D., *Satyricon*, *translated by* WILLIAM BURNABY

Love Unspoken

When within my arms I hold you,
Motionless in long surrender,
Then what love-words can I summon,
Tender as my heart is tender?

When within your arms you hold me,
And kisses speak your love unspoken,
Then my eyes with tears run over,
And my very heart is broken.

ROBERT NICHOLS, *Aurelia*

Flowering Violets

The view was forming at last; she could discern the river, the golden plain, other hills.

"Eccolo!" he exclaimed.

At the same moment the ground gave way, and with a cry she fell out of the wood. Light and beauty enveloped her. She had fallen on to a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to end.

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"Courage!" cried her companion, now standing some six feet above. "Courage and love."

She did not answer. From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hill-side with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.

Standing at its brink, like a swimmer who prepares, was the good man. But he was not the good man that she had expected, and he was alone.

George had turned at the sound of her arrival. For a moment he contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her.

Before she could speak, almost before she could feel, a voice called, "Lucy! Lucy! Lucy!" The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who stood brown against the view.

E. M. FORSTER, *A Room with a View*

Under Venus

Young and simple though I am
I have heard of Cupid's name,
I can guess what thing it is
Men desire when they do kiss;
Smoke can never burn, they say,
But the flames that follow may.

I am not so foul or fair
To be proud or to despair;
Yet my lips have oft observed
Men that kiss them press them hard,
As glad lovers use to do
When their new met loves they woo.

Faith, 'tis but a foolish mind,
Yet methinks a heart I find
Like thirst longing that doth bide
Ever on my weaker side,
Where they say my heart doth move;
Venus grant it be not love.

THOMAS CAMPION

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Elixir

Fill a glass with golden wine,
And the while your lips are wet
Set their perfume into mine,
And forget,
Every kiss we take and give
Leaves us less of life to live.

W. E. HENLEY

Experimental

One evening, when at bedtime, his sisters and I stood round him, bidding him goodnight, he kissed each of them, as was his custom; and, as was equally his custom, he gave me his hand. Diana, who chanced to be in a frolicsome humour (she was not painfully controlled by his will; for hers, in another way was as strong), exclaimed:—

"St. John! You used to call Jane your third sister, but you don't treat her as such: you should kiss her too."

She pushed me towards him. I thought Diana very provoking, and felt uncomfortably confused; and while I was thus thinking and feeling, St. John bent his head: his Greek face was brought to a level with mine, his eyes questioned my eyes piercingly—he kissed me. There are no such things as marble kisses, or ice kisses, or I should say my ecclesiastical cousin's salute belonged to one of these classes; but there may be experimental kisses, and his was an experimental kiss. When given, he viewed me to learn the result; it was not striking; I am sure I did not blush; perhaps I might have turned a little pale, for I felt as if the kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. He never omitted the ceremony afterwards, and the gravity and quiescence with which I underwent it, seemed to invest it for him with a certain charm.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *Jane Eyre*

Make Soft Her Heart . . .

Love guards the roses of thy lips
And flys about them like a bee;
If I approach he forward skips,
And if I kiss he stingeth me . . .

Love, let me cull her choicest flowers;
And pity me, and calm her eye;
Make soft her heart, dissolve her lours;
Then will I praise thy deity.

THOMAS LODGE, c. 1558-1625

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TRAP OF GOLD

Fear came swiftly, as the rock quivered like a stabbed beast

by LOUIS L'AMOUR

WETHERTON had been three months out of Horsehead before he found his first colour. At first it was a few scattered grains taken from the base of an alluvial fan where millions of tons of sand and silt had washed down from a chain of rugged peaks; yet the gold was ragged under the magnifying-glass.

Gold that has been carried any distance becomes worn and polished by the abrasive action of the accompanying rocks and sand, so this could not have been carried far. With caution born of harsh experience he seated himself and lighted his pipe, yet excitement was strong within him.

A contemplative man by nature, experience had taught him how a man may be deluded by hope, yet all his instincts told him the source of the gold was somewhere on the mountain above. It could have come down the wash that skirted the base of the mountain, but the ragged condition of the gold made that improbable.

The base of the fan was a half-mile across and hundreds of feet thick, built of silt and sand washed down by centuries of erosion among the higher peaks. The point of the wide V of the fan lay between two towering upthrusts of granite, but from where Wetherton sat he could see that the actual source of the fan lay much higher.

Wetherton made camp near a tiny spring west of the fan, then tethered his burros and began his climb. When he was well over two thousand feet higher he stopped, resting again, and while resting he dry-panned some of the silt.

Surprisingly, there were more than a few grains of gold even in that first pan, so he continued his climb, and passed at last between the towering portals of the granite columns.

Above this natural gate were three smaller alluvial fans that joined at the gate to pour into the greater fan below. Dry-panning two of these brought no results, but the third, even by the relatively poor method of dry-panning, showed a dozen colours, all of good size.

The head of this fan lay in a gigantic crack in a granitic upthrust

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that resembled a fantastic ruin. Pausing to catch his breath, his gaze wandered along the base of this upthrust, and right before him the crumbling granite was slashed with a vein of quartz that was literally laced with gold!

Struggling nearer through the loose sand, his heart pounding more from excitement than from altitude and exertion, he came to an abrupt stop. The band of quartz was six feet wide and those six feet were cobwebbed with gold.

It was unbelievable, but here it was.

Yet even in this moment of success, something about the beetling cliff stopped him from going forward. His innate caution took hold and he drew back to examine it at greater length.

Wary of what he saw, he circled the batholith and then climbed to the ridge behind it, from which he could look down on the roof. What he saw from there left him dry-mouthed and jittery.

The granitic batholith was obviously a part of a much older range, one that had weathered and worn, suffered from shock and twisting, until finally this tower of granite had been violently upthrust, leaving it standing, a shaky ruin among younger and sturdier peaks. In the process the rock had been shattered and riven by mighty forces until it had become a miner's horror.

Wetherton stared, fascinated by the prospect. With enormous wealth here for the taking, every ounce must be taken at the risk of life.

One stick of powder might bring the whole crumbling mass down in a heap, and it loomed all of three hundred feet above its base in the fan. The roof of the batholith was riven with gigantic cracks, seamed with breaks like the wall of an ancient building that has remained standing after heavy bombing.

Walking back to the base of the tower, Wetherton found he could actually break chunks of the quartz loose with his fingers.

The vein itself lay on the downhill side and at the very base. The outer wall of the upthrust was sharply tilted so that a man working at the vein would be cutting his way into the very foundations of the tower, and any single blow of the pick might bring the whole mass down on him.

Furthermore, if the rock did fall, the vein would be hopelessly buried under thousands of tons of rock and irrecoverable except by the expenditure of much more capital than he could command. And at this moment Wetherton's total of money in hand amounted to slightly less than forty dollars.

Thirty yards from the face he seated himself on the sand and filled his pipe once more. A man might take tons out of there without trouble, or it might collapse at the first blow. Yet he knew he had no choice. He needed money and it lay here before him.

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Even if he were at first successful there were two things he must avoid. The first was tolerance of danger that might bring carelessness; the second, that urge to go back for the "little bit more" that could kill him.

It was well into the afternoon and he had not eaten, yet he was not hungry. He circled the batholith, studying it from every angle only to reach the conclusion that his first estimate had been correct. The only way to get at the gold was to go into the very shadow of the leaning wall and attack it at its base, digging it out by main strength.

From where he stood it seemed ridiculous that a mere man with a pick could topple that mass of rock, yet he knew how delicate such a balance could be.

The batholith was situated on what might be described as the military crest of the ridge, and the alluvial fan sloped steeply away from its lower side, steeper than a steep stairway.

The top of the leaning wall overshadowed the top of the fan, and if it started to crumble and a man had warning, he might run to the north with a bare chance of escape. The soft sand in which he must run would be an impediment, but that could be alleviated by making a walk from flat rocks sunk into the sand.

It was dusk when he returned to his camp. Deliberately, he had not permitted himself to begin work, not by so much as a sample.

He must be deliberate in all his actions, and never for a second should he forget the mass that towered above him. A split second of hesitation when the crash came—and he accepted it as inevitable—would mean burial under tons of crumbled rock.

The following morning he tethered his burros on a small meadow near the spring, cleaned the spring itself and prepared a lunch. Then he removed his shirt, drew on a pair of gloves and walked to the face of the cliff.

Yet even then he did not begin, knowing that upon this habit of care and deliberation might depend not only his success in the venture, but life itself. He gathered flat stones and began building his walk.

"When you start moving," he told himself, "you'll have to move fast."

Finally, and with infinite care, he began tapping at the quartz, enlarging cracks with the pick, removing fragments, then prying loose whole chunks. He did not swing the pick, but used it as a lever.

The quartz was rotten, and a man might obtain a considerable amount by this method of picking or even pulling with the hands.

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When he had a sack filled with the richest quartz he carried it over his path to a safe place beyond the shadow of the tower. Returning, he stamped a few more flat rocks into his path and began on the second sack.

He worked with greater care than was, perhaps, essential. He was not, and had never been, a gambling man.

In the present operation he was taking a carefully calculated risk in which every eventuality had been weighed and judged. He needed the money and he intended to have it; he had a good idea of his chances of success, but knew that his gravest danger was to become too greedy, too much engrossed in his task.

Dragging the two sacks down the hill, he found a flat block of stone and with a single jack proceeded to break up the quartz.

It was a slow and a hard job but he had no better means of extracting the gold. After breaking or crushing the quartz much of the gold could be separated by a knife blade, for it was amazingly concentrated. With water from the spring Wetherton panned the remainder until it was too dark to see.

Out of his blankets by daybreak, he ate breakfast and completed the extraction of the gold. At a rough estimate his first day's work would run to four hundred dollars. He made a cache for the gold sack, took the now empty ore sacks and climbed back to the tower.

The air was clear and fresh, the sun warm after the chill of night, and he liked the feel of the pick in his hands.

Laura and Tommy awaited him back in Horsehead, and if he was killed here, there was small chance they would ever know what had become of him. But he did not intend to be killed. The gold he was extracting from this rock was for them, and not for himself.

It would mean an easier life in a larger town, a home of their own and the things to make the home a woman desires, and it meant an education for Tommy. For himself, all he needed was the thought of that home to return to, his wife and son—and the desert itself. And one was as necessary to him as the other.

The desert would be the death of him. He had been told that many times, and did not need to be told, for few men knew the desert as he did. The desert was to him what an orchestra is to a fine conductor, what the human body is to a surgeon. It was his work, his life and the thing he knew best.

He always smiled when he looked first into the desert as he started a new trip. Would this be it?

The morning drew on and he continued to work with an even-paced swing of the pick, a careful filling of the sack. The gold showed bright and beautiful in the crystalline quartz which was so much more beautiful than the gold itself.

From time to time as the morning drew on, he paused to rest

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and to breathe deeply of the fresh, clear air. Deliberately, he refused to hurry.

For nineteen days he worked tirelessly, eight hours a day at first, then lessening his hours to seven, and then to six. Wetherton did not explain to himself why he did this, but he realized it was becoming increasingly difficult to stay on the job.

Again and again he would walk away from the rock face on one excuse or another, and each time he would begin to feel his scalp prickle, his steps grow quicker, and each time he returned more reluctantly.

Three times, beginning on the thirteenth, again on the seventeenth and finally on the nineteenth day, he heard movement within the tower. Whether that whispering in the rock was normal he did not know. Such a natural movement might have been going on for centuries. He only knew that it happened now, and each time it happened a cold chill went along his spine.

His work had cut a deep notch at the base of the tower, such a notch as a man might make in felling a tree, but wider and deeper.

The sacks of gold, too, were increasing. They now numbered seven, and their total would, he believed, amount to more than five thousand dollars—probably nearer to six thousand. As he cut deeper into the rock the vein was growing richer.

He worked on his knees now. The vein had slanted downwards as he cut into the base of the tower and he was all of nine feet into the rock with the great mass of it above him. If that rock gave way while he was working he would be crushed in an instant with no chance of escape. Nevertheless, he continued.

The change in the rock tower was not the only change, for he had lost weight and he no longer slept well. On the night of the twentieth day he decided he had six thousand dollars and his goal would be ten thousand.

And the following day the rock was the richest ever! As if to tantalize him into working on and on, the deeper he cut the richer the ore became. By nightfall of that day he had taken out more than a thousand dollars.

Now the lust of the gold was getting into him, taking him by the throat. He was fascinated by the danger of the tower as well as the desire for the gold.

Three more days to go—could he leave it then? He looked again at the batholith and felt a peculiar sense of foreboding, a feeling that here he was to die, that he would never escape. Was it his imagination, or had the outer wall leaned a little more?

On the morning of the twenty-second day he climbed the fan over a path that use had built into a series of continuous steps.

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He had never counted those steps but there must have been over a thousand of them. Dropping his canteen into a shaded hollow, he started for the tower, pick in hand.

The forward tilt *did* seem somewhat more than before. Or was it the light!? The crack that ran behind the outer wall seemed to have widened and when he examined it more closely he found a small pile of freshly run silt near the bottom of the crack. So it had moved!

Wetherton hesitated, staring at the rock with wary attention. He was a fool to go back in there again. Seven thousand dollars was more than he had ever had in his life before, yet in the next few hours he could take out at least a thousand dollars more and in the next three days he could easily have the ten thousand he had set for his goal.

He walked to the opening, dropped to his knees and crawled into the narrowing, flat-roofed hole. No sooner was he inside than fear climbed up into his throat.

He felt trapped, stifled, but he fought down the mounting panic and began to work. His first blows were so frightened and feeble that nothing came loose. Yet, when he did get started, he began to work with a feverish intensity that was wholly unlike him.

When he slowed and then stopped to fill his sack he was gasping for breath, but despite his hurry the sack was not quite full.

Reluctantly, he lifted his pick again, but before he could strike a blow, the gigantic mass above him seemed to creak like something tired and old. A deep shudder went through the colossal pile and then a deep grinding that turned him sick with horror.

All his plans for instant flight were frozen and it was not until the groaning ceased that he realized he was lying on his back, breathless with fear and expectancy. Slowly, he edged his way into the air and walked, fighting the desire to run, away from the rock.

When he stopped near his canteen he was wringing with cold sweat and trembling in every muscle. He sat down on the rock and fought for control. It was not until some twenty minutes had passed that he could trust himself to get to his feet.

Despite his experience, he knew that if he did not go back now he would never go. He had out but one sack for the day and wanted another.

Circling the batholith, he examined the widening crack, endeavouring again, for the third time, to find another means of access to the vein.

The tilt of the outer wall was obvious, and it could stand no more without toppling. It was possible that by cutting into the wall of the column and striking down he might tap the vein at a safer point.

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Yet this added blow at the foundation would bring the tower nearer to collapse and render his other hole untenable. Even this new attempt would not be safe, although immeasurably more secure than the hole he had left. Hesitating, he looked back at the hole.

Once more? The ore was now fabulously rich, and the few pounds that he needed to complete the sack he could get in just a little while. He stared at the black and undoubtedly narrower hole, then looked up at the leaning wall. He took up his pick and, his mouth dry, started back, drawn by a fascination that was beyond all reason.

His heart pounding, he dropped to his knees at the tunnel face. The air seemed stifling and he could feel his scalp tingling, but once he started to crawl it was better.

The face where he now worked was at least sixteen feet from the tunnel mouth. Pick in hand, he began to wedge chunks from their seat. The going seemed harder now and the chunks did not come loose so easily.

Above him the tower made no sound. The crushing weight was now something tangible. He could almost feel it growing, increasing with every move of his. The mountain seemed to be resting on his shoulder, crushing the air from his lungs.

Suddenly he stopped. His sack almost full, he stopped and lay very still, staring up at the bulk of the rock above him.

No.

He would go no further. Now he would quit. Not another sackful. Not another pound. He would go out now. He would go down the mountain without a backward look, and he would keep going. His wife waiting at home, his little son, who would run gladly to meet him—these were too much to gamble.

With the decision came peace, came certainty. He sighed deeply and relaxed, and then it seemed to him that every muscle in his body had been knotted with strain. He turned on his side and with great deliberation gathered his lantern, his sack, his hand-pick.

He had won. He had defeated the crumbling tower, he had defeated his own greed. He backed easily, without the caution that had marked his earlier movements in the cave. His blind, trusting foot found the projecting rock, a piece of quartz that stuck out from the rough-hewn wall.

The blow was too weak, too feeble to have brought forth the reaction that followed. The rock seemed to quiver like the flesh of a stabbed beast; a queer vibration went through that ancient rock, then a deep, gasping sigh.

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He had waited too long!

Fear came swiftly in upon him, crowding him, while his body twisted, contracting into the smallest possible space. He tried to will his muscles to move beneath the growing sounds that vibrated through the passage. The whispers of the rock grew into a terrifying groan, and there was a rattle of pebbles. Then silence.

The silence was more horrifying than the sound. Somehow he was crawling, even as he expected the avalanche of gold to bury him. Abruptly, his feet were in the open. He was out.

He ran without stopping, but behind him he heard a growing roar that he couldn't outrace. When he knew from the slope of the land that he must be safe from falling rock, he fell to his knees. He turned and looked back.

The muted, roaring sound, like thunder beyond mountains, continued, but there was no visible change in the batholith.

Suddenly, as he watched, the whole rock formation seemed to shift and tip. The movement lasted only seconds, but before the tons of rock had found their new equilibrium, his tunnel and the area around it had utterly vanished from sight.

When he could finally stand, Wetherton gathered up his sack of ore and his canteen. The wind was cool upon his face as he walked away; and he did not look back again.

* * *

MOT JUSTE

Perhaps because Henry James had first come to know distinguished writers in France he took the pedestal on which his admirers placed him as a natural prerogative. He was touchy and could be cross when he was not treated with what he thought proper respect. On one occasion a young Irish friend of mine was staying at Hill for the week-end in company with Henry James. Mrs. Hunter, their hostess, told him that he was a talented young man and Henry James on the Saturday afternoon engaged him in conversation. My friend was petulant and impatient, and at length, driven to desperation by James's interminable struggle to find the one word that would express exactly what he wanted to say, blurted out: "Oh, Mr. James, I'm not of any importance. Don't bother about rooting around for the right word. Any old word is good enough for me." Henry James was deeply affronted and complained to Mrs. Hunter that the young man had been very rude to him, whereupon Mrs. Hunter gave him a severe scolding and insisted that he should apologize to her distinguished guest.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM, *Some Novelists I Have Known*

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THE LAST PIRATE

As I looked at him, big black beard blown flat in the wind, I knew what sort of man he was

by B. JOYNSON COBK

EVEN his name was appropriate, though I didn't appreciate it at the time. I just checked on my road map that I'd finally got to Le Roquel and then asked for Monsieur Morgan, "the Englishman." It seemed the most likely way of finding him, because Breton fishing villages don't usually boast a large British population, and from what I'd heard of Morgan he wasn't the sort of man the locals could very well overlook.

All the same, it surprised me when the peasant I'd asked took his time in looking me over. It was vaguely disquieting, just sitting there behind the steering-wheel, being looked at. Rather like being scrutinized by a sentry, except that in this case you could hear the man's mind tick. *A stranger and an Englishman.* Bad. *Drives too old a car to be an official, speaks recognizable French.* Less bad. And then finally making up his mind with the statement that one would find le capitaine in the Bar Franklin Roosevelt. Without doubt.

"You are too kind," I said, and let the old Citroen coast down the narrow village street, squinting into the sun that was reflecting off the sea.

It didn't take me long to find the Bar Franklin Roosevelt, because it turned out to be on a corner, only a few yards from the little quay. The name painted above the awning was beginning to fade slightly, but you could see it was a good deal more recent than most of the exterior decorations of Le Roquel. I found myself wondering whether the name dated from America's entry into the war, the second front or simply Marshall Aid. On balance it seemed more likely to be the latter. Anyway it looked a pleasant enough little place. I parked the car under the lime trees in the shade and went inside.

Generally speaking, the people you'll find in bars like the Franklin Roosevelt vary very little from one part of the coast to another. There's the odd fisherman and the fellow who looks after the local garage. And possibly in a corner a nondescript pair of old men who look as though they're discussing theology but are

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far more likely to be getting to grips over the favourite in the latest bicycle race. They're so much alike from one bar to another that you almost get around to carrying on somebody else's conversation where you left it off twenty miles back.

But this place was different.

Morgan was sitting at a table over by the window. I knew him without having to ask because he couldn't possibly have been anyone else. He was an enormous man in a blue turtle-necked sweater, canvas slacks, a yachting cap and a big black beard. I suppose he was somewhere in his late thirties, weather-beaten and tough. There was something about the man that attracted you to him before he even opened his mouth. When I got through the door he was pouring himself a drink of what looked like rum and making aggressive love to a couple of the local girls who were regarding him with the sort of look you'd have thought they'd have kept for at least an American top sergeant. His French was inaccurate but enormously fluent. He was getting on fine.

I said, "Captain Morgan?"

He looked up at me. Although his beard was black his eyes were the blue that the majority of sailors seem to acquire as part of their uniform. He looked straight at me and then showed a set of cinema-white teeth in acknowledgement. "My name's Chaucer," I told him. "Andreas told me about you." This was true, though I didn't see any point in telling him that my acquaintance with the latter was limited to a half-hour conversation in a railway waiting-room. It had been Lieutenant Bergeron of the Customs and Excise who'd really put me on to Morgan in the first place. We'd been talking about smuggling—gun-running—frontier-hopping and the rest of it. And then he'd told me about one of my countrymen that he, Bergeron, would have given six months' pay to pin something on. Six months' pay is a lot in the French Customs Service. I asked him what the difficulty was.

"Catching him," Bergeron had said. "He's got an infernal motor boat that's twenty knots faster than anything we've got. The thing's been making a fortune for him, carrying everything from dynamite to displaced persons for the last four years."

"Openly?"

"My God!" Bergeron had said. "He almost advertises." Then he'd added, "You writers like strange types—why don't you go and have a look? Before I catch him, that is."

I'd said that I didn't mind, but what about introductions?

"There's a man," Bergeron had told me, "a man named Andreas who acts as a sort of agent. He'll fix you up all right."

That was the way I knew Andreas.

"All right, girls," Morgan said. "Better run along now."

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They got up reluctantly, giving me the sort of look of cold hatred that a cat gives you when you take away its dinner. I sat down in one of the vacant chairs while Morgan called for another glass. When it came he poured me a drink.

I wondered how to start and eventually decided that I might as well tell him at least half the truth. "Andreas told me about you," I said again. "That was some time ago, though. I happened to be down on this part of the coast and thought I might as well see for myself."

He asked, "Why the interest?"

"Nothing special," I said. "I'd just heard about people in your line of business and wanted to see for myself."

"Good show." The dated Air Force expression seemed out of place. Inappropriate. He asked, "Writer?"

"Yes."

"Want to write an article about me for the Sunday papers?"

I said no, I didn't write articles. Certainly not for the Sunday papers. He nodded. It was impossible to tell whether he was reassured or just disappointed, because his expression never altered. Finally he said, "How much do you know about this business?"

"Not much," I admitted. "Just the rough idea. That after the war a few people like yourself got bored with things at home and came over here. That you bought ex-navy motor torpedo boats cheap and then used them for—hire work." At this point I didn't know whether to be delicate or not. After a moment's hesitation I took the plunge and added, "I gather it was a rule not to ask too many questions about the cargoes."

Morgan laughed, creasing the tanned skin round his eyes. "Too ruddy true!" Once again his choice of words surprised me. One just didn't expect a man of his age to talk like a twenty-year-old pilot in the Battle of Britain. Ten-year-old slang is very old indeed. "Have another drink," he suggested absently. He slopped rum into my glass. Obviously he wasn't particularly enthusiastic about indulging my curiosity and I couldn't blame him. If I'd been in his shoes I'd have felt the same way. Finally Morgan said, "You know about all there is that's worth knowing. Three or four years ago there were a stack of types along this coast beating it up in M.L.s. Ex-navy, mostly. Some got shot and some went respectable. I'm about the only one left."

"Are you a navy man yourself?"

"No," he said. "Air Force." That accounted for the "good shows" and so on, I supposed. But not entirely. It still didn't seem absolutely right. "How's business?" I asked.

"Oh wizard," Morgan said. "Bang on. There's no competition, you see."

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I said no, I supposed there wasn't. And what provided most of his business these days, anyway?

"Private charter. Amazing how many types want to charter a fast boat." Obviously he was ready to talk up to a certain point and that was all. We sat looking at each other, drinking the rum. Nobody else in the bar seemed to be talking much either, and I supposed that was because they were all too busy looking at us. Le Capitaine was obviously a rather treasured local character.

Then came one of those happy strokes of luck that you don't even recognize as being anything special at the time. One of the customers went out, and as he pushed the swing door a gust of air blew an old sheet of newspaper across the floor. It sailed over a couple of tables, brushing the two old theological gentlemen in passing and everybody automatically made a snatch at it, including Morgan, who missed it by a couple of inches. Finally it spread itself momentarily against a wooden cupboard. Almost without thinking I picked up a table knife that for some reason was lying in front of me and flicked it across the room.

When I was about fourteen a misguided relative had taken me to a circus that included, among other things, a man who made a practice of throwing knives and hatchets at his wife. This had so fired my imagination at the time that I devoted myself almost exclusively during the following month or so to the mastering of the art of knife-throwing. Luckily Providence decided that I should tire of the art before I graduated to hatchets, but be that as it may, I can still throw a knife.

On this occasion it caught the stained sheet of paper fairly, pinning it to the cupboard door. The other people in the bar gave me a mild round of applause, but Morgan looked at me with obvious and undisguised admiration. It was as if in some way the act had worked on his imagination as nothing else could.

"It's a knack," I said. "I learned it at school."

He laughed then, and for the first time I felt that it was quite genuine. For the first time I'd registered. I wondered what it was in him that should have warmed so suddenly to such a trivial thing as throwing a knife across a room at a piece of paper. He asked conversationally: "Have you ever done smuggling yourself?"

I said no, I hadn't.

"I don't do much myself now the M.L.'s laid up. There's no future in it with an M.G.B."

"I'm sorry," I said. "You'll have to translate."

Morgan grinned. The knife-throwing act had done the trick all right. He explained: "Just after the war most of the types bought up M.L.s from the Admiralty. They're seagoing motor launches—sixty-five feet long with diesels. Stacks of room and

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all that. We used to load them to the brim with brandy and run across to Cornwall at night."

"And now?"

"It was getting a bit chancy towards the end," Morgan admitted. "Too many of us apart from other things. So I let the smuggling to U.K. go and got an M.G.B." He made an explanatory gesture with his glass. "That's a Motor Gun Boat. Smaller than the M.L.s and they smash themselves to pieces if the sea's not like a pond. But can they move!"

"How fast?" I asked.

"Mine does forty-five knots. Come down and look at her."

We got up and went outside. Morgan led the way down to the side of the quay and I looked over.

"There she is," he said.

The boat was painted all black. It was about forty-five feet long, the deck sweeping gracefully in an extended curve from bow to stern. Roughly amidships there was a certain amount of superstructure—a big, glass-sided cabin and a tiny wheel-house forward of it. Then a single short mast with a wireless antenna trailing from it. I recognized the whole thing as something I'd seen on naval exercises and films often enough, tearing through the water with a huge bow wave sweeping out from either side. The vessel gave an extraordinary impression of speed and sheer power. Somehow I wasn't surprised to see that her name was *Sea Wraith*. It was the sort of name I would have expected Morgan to pick for her.

"Come aboard and look around."

I followed him down the stone steps and dropped the last few feet on to the deck. At that level everything seemed a good deal larger than from the top of the quay.

"What sort of crew do you need for a thing like this?" I asked.

Morgan said, "Four. Coxswain, engineer and a couple of hands. They're around the town somewhere, getting drunk. Not too drunk, though. We're off tonight."

"All right," I said, "I won't ask questions."

Morgan pulled at his big beard. "I'm taking a man down the coast. He's paying well—that's about all I know." He saw the look of query on my face and shrugged his shoulders. "He's not getting out of the country, and there's only a box or two of cargo. So it can't be guns. Might be dope, but I doubt it."

"You don't mind not knowing what you're carrying, then?"

"I'm paid for not knowing half the time," Morgan said. "This isn't a pleasure steamer, and I'm not a fussy man." Then he added, "Do you want to come?"

I told myself that there was no point in being surprised, because

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consciously or unconsciously this was what I'd been working for. "Yes," I said. "I'll come along. What time do you want me aboard?"

"Six o'clock."

"I'll be here."

Morgan nodded. "Good show!" he said. "Good show!" I wished he'd stop saying that. It was beginning to get on my nerves.

I got back to the *Sea Wraith* a little before six. Morgan was standing by the wheel-house, wearing a duffel coat and watching his crew as they moved about the vessel making last-minute adjustments. The one Englishman among them was a little Cockney called Rogers who gave me a doubtful look as I came aboard. But I wasn't interested in the coxswain. Morgan was the man I was after. He was beginning to grow on me. I wanted to see more of him.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Just about. Come around with me—see what there is to see while you're here." Morgan was obviously on top of the world. His huge body seemed to be almost bursting at the seams with it all. He showed me the engines—a couple of huge Napier petrols that must have had a quite fantastic fuel consumption, then the wheel-house, with its auxiliary set of manual controls. I began to wonder what the running costs of the whole outfit must add up to.

We'd reached the cabin behind the wheel-house by the time the night's passenger came aboard.

Morgan said, "You'd better meet Mr. Smith."

I took a look at an unpleasant looking little man with a bald head and a paunch. He wore a gaberdine suit and a transatlantic tie and his face had that odd, dead look that men seem to acquire when they spend too many years concealing their business from other people. His teeth were bad and his eyes too small; and his name was very obviously a courtesy title because the only language he appeared to speak was a sort of Alsatian French.

We shook hands and Mr. Smith said, "I didn't know there was to be another passenger."

"He's not a passenger," Morgan said. "He's part of the crew. Where's the rest of your stuff?"

Smith indicated his suitcase.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

Morgan shrugged his shoulders. I could see he was wondering what could be in that suitcase that made it worth a man's while to charter the *Sea Wraith* in order to transport it from one place to

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another in France. Whatever it was, I decided, it must have been as hot as hell. Stolen jewellery? I tried to remember if there'd been any really big robberies lately, but it wasn't a thing I followed much. It could have been dope, of course, but the cocaine boys have their own ways of doing business, and special charter boats don't usually feature in them. I had no doubt Morgan would have given a lot to open that case up. But as he said, he wasn't paid to ask questions.

We went down into the big cabin and Morgan got out a map and pointed to an inlet about a hundred and fifty miles down the coast. There didn't seem to be any town there, but there was a little group of islands just off the shore that were marked "L'Escargot." If you looked at them that way they did look vaguely like a snail.

"Is that the place?"

Yes, Mr. Smith agreed. That was the place all right.

"You realise that if anything happens to the weather we'll have to put in somewhere?" Morgan asked him. "This boat wasn't built for the rough stuff."

Mr. Smith shifted his eyes round from one to the other of us and said that he quite understood. It was speed he was interested in. Then he produced an enormous wad of notes and passed them over. Morgan pushed them into his pocket without looking at them and jerked his head to me. We left Mr. Smith and went forward. "Well?" Morgan said.

"He's a nasty-looking piece of work."

"Most of the people I deal with are nasty-looking pieces of work," Morgan said. "Except the women. Some of those are quite something. All the same I think you're right. I don't like the feel of this one."

I said, "His money looked all right."

Morgan looked moodily out to sea. It was dead calm, hardly a ripple as far as the horizon. "You don't want to take too much notice of the money," he said. "It goes, you know. By the time you've run your boat and paid the crew enough wages to keep them quiet, hell, no. The profit's gone out of the game."

I didn't make any comment on that. Instead I stayed down on the foredeck while he went on to the tiny bridge to supervise casting off. I heard the telegraph ringing somewhere aft, and a moment later the deep rumble of the engines starting. The whole boat came alive with them, the deck trembling gently, the water boiling below the transom. Then the hawsers dropped away and the whole boat swung outwards till it was pointing towards the open sea. The telegraph rang again and the engine gathered speed. Morgan shouted to me to go up with him on the bridge and I climbed up beside him just as we got clear of the quay. Then the

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engines suddenly began to turn over really fast. The bow lifted as the *Sea Wraith* got up on her step and began to swing great torrents of water away from the sheer of her bows. I had a sudden and greater feeling of speed than I'd ever experienced in my life. It was as if the whole vessel were trying to lift herself out of the water.

Morgan was shouting something to me, but the wind and the steady roar of the engines tore the words away. I saw he was laughing behind his beard, drunk with the whole thing. His face wasn't that of a man nearing forty. It was that of an excited schoolboy playing with a favourite toy. And in that moment I realized that I knew all there was to know about Morgan. Standing there looking at him, with his big black beard blown flat in the wind, his hands resting on the baffles of the bridge in front of him, I knew what sort of man he was and for that matter what sort of men the pirates in the old days must have been. Because in everything that mattered Morgan was a pirate himself. Possibly he was the very last pirate.

I wedged myself into the angle of the bridge so that I could watch him, bracing my feet against the bucking of the deck because every time the *Sea Wraith* struck even a small wave at that speed it was like hitting a rock. You could hear the water banging against the hull so that it shook.

In the old days, of course, they'd started in a dozen different ways. Henry Morgan the governor. Captain Kidd, the King's privateer. The official task first—the license to kill. Then the end of the war, the peace treaty with the foreign power whose ships had previously been fair game. And after that the bored, restless, half adolescent personality chafing at inactivity and yearning for the brave old days. So, finally to the Jolly Roger and the outlawry of the seas till it was all ended by some bloody battle or by hanging half drowned in Execution Dock waiting for the tide to come up.

No, I decided, there wasn't so much difference. Not between captaining a privateer and a fighter aircraft, if you had that sort of mind. The more I thought about it the more it all fitted in. The out-of-date, rather schoolboyish slang. The inexplicable, childish enthusiasm at the fact that I could throw a knife. What queer trick of development, I wondered, ordained that a man like Morgan should have all the outwardly desirable things like courage and authority and yet be deprived of the ability to grow up?

"Come down and have a drink," Morgan was shouting. I nodded and we went down the companion-way, past the little coxswain standing immobile in the wheel-house as he kept the bucketing M.G.B. on course as the night swept up across the darkening sea. As we ducked into the captain's cabin the two

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French hands appeared, lugging something between them. I had a second look and saw that it was a Bren gun with an anti-aircraft mounting.

Morgan said casually, "You never know." He pulled the door shut and the howling of the wind dropped a couple of tones. The cabin was comfortable and unexpectedly large. "Rum?"

"Thanks." I knew now why it was always rum. I wondered if Morgan ever suspected himself.

We sat drinking and talking as the coast slipped by and we carried Mr. Smith and his suitcase south.

We reached the group of islands called "The Snail" just after ten o'clock. There was a full moon up and you could see as much detail of the coast as if it had been day. It was in rocky, lonely country, with an extraordinary, outjutting rock formation enclosing a stretch of water about a mile wide. So far as I could see there was only one narrow entry to it. It was the nearest thing to a lagoon I'd seen this side of the tropics.

On the bridge Morgan rang for slow. The stem of the boat dropped and we lost way. As we did so I noticed that the wind was freshening. Morgan seemed to notice it too, because he glanced out to sea and then up at the sky. Then he said, "Let's have Smith up here."

I called to one of the deck hands to bring our passenger from the aft cabin. He came, dressed now in a camel hair coat and looking a bit green.

"Is this the place?" Morgan asked him in his incredible French.

Smith, or whatever his real name was, looked out over the rail. Then he nodded. It was the right place. The boat should be taken through the opening in the rocks and then as near to the shore as possible.

Morgan followed the direction of the pointing finger, dropped down the companion-way again and relieved Rogers at the wheel. From that position he could control the whole of the *Sea Wraith* himself, without relying on voice tube or telegraph. The throttles and rudder were in his own hands.

He could handle a boat all right. We slid into the shelter of the rocks as though Morgan had known the place all his life. Dead slow, with the two engines only just ticking over, we made for a big rock just off the beach. When it looked as though the M.G.B. couldn't avoid ramming it the engines roared again briefly, the stern swung round and the lines were ashore.

"Thank you, captain," Mr. Smith said. "I think I will be going ashore now."

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"That's up to you," Morgan said. He made it quite clear that he wasn't interested in Mr. Smith any more, but in the end we got out on to the rock, leaning forward a little because the wind that had got up was blowing hard in our faces.

And then, in the shadow of the little group of islands beyond the enclosing rocks I saw something moving in the moonlight.

I touched Morgan's arm. "Have a look behind," I said.

He turned round and looked. Then he swore quietly. As we watched another shadow detached itself from the shadow of one of the islands and joined the one I'd noticed first of all. We both knew what they were. They were a couple of gunboats belonging to the French Customs.

"Oh, Mr. Smith!" Morgan said. There was only reproach in his voice.

"I don't know anything about them," Smith said quickly. I could understand now why he was in such a hurry to get ashore. The sweat was standing out in little beads on his face. He was horribly frightened and trying not to show it.

Morgan said softly, "I knew this job stank. I couldn't quite place what was wrong, that was all." The Alsatian didn't say anything but just licked his lips. To me, Morgan said unhurriedly, "You get the set up?"

"I think so," I said. "You've been making yourself a bit too unpopular. Those Customs boats have been waiting for you to come in here."

Morgan said, "Correct. And how did they know I'd be here? You tell us, Mr. Smith."

"I don't know anything about it," Smith said.

Morgan smiled. "Like hell you don't." He swung his arm and caught the little man across the face with the back of his hand. It made a crack like a pistol going off and he'd have gone down like a shot rabbit if the little coxswain hadn't caught him and pushed him upright again. I caught a glimpse of Morgan's face and realised he was going to be very tough with Mr. Smith. It was in character, anyway. Lots of adolescents are unbelievably brutal. Certainly the man I was looking at could have made a hundred poor devils walk the plank without batting an eyelid. He turned to me and said, "This should be something to put in your book. How a stool pigeon works. The customs pay him to bring contraband on board and hire me to take him to a nice quiet spot. All the customs people in the world are waiting till I'm nicely bottled up in this bloody lake. Then they collect me and the boat and the contraband at one go. It's too easy."

I began to realise that I was going to be lucky to get away with less than five years myself. Morgan seemed to sense what I was

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thinking, because he said, "Pretend to get back on board. Take the crew with you. If you wade you'll be able to nip along the beach and get away the other side."

"Look," I said, "we don't have to worry yet. Those boats are a good way away."

Morgan laughed. "You don't think they've left it to them, do you? There'll be a couple of hundred police or troops waiting inland under those trees."

I had a look across the beach and saw that there was a wood that came almost down to the sands. An army could have hidden in it. "What about you?" I asked.

"I'll be all right. It'll be a bit chancy, but I want to save the boat if I can."

"All right," I said. "Good luck to you." I dropped down the face of the rock as though I was going back on board the *Sea Wraith*, the coxswain and the three Frenchmen following me. Mr. Smith made a move as though to come too.

"Not you," Morgan said.

I heard the Alsatian say, "I tell you, captain—" and then he stopped. I looked back from where I was standing up to my knees in water to see him turn suddenly and begin to run. He jumped off the rock into the shallows and splashed clumsily ashore, scrambling up the shingle. As he ran he shouted something, as if to people he couldn't see but knew were there. The wind was still rising and I couldn't catch his words.

One thing I could hear, though, was Morgan laughing. He'd turned away from me and the moonlight was shining on the barrel of a Luger that he was steadying against his left arm.

He took his time, as though he were on a range. Then he shot Mr. Smith three times. Once as he ran. Once as the body pitched forward on to the little stones. Once as he lay. I heard the tinkle of the empty shells thrown back by the ejection.

Rogers and the three Frenchmen had vanished into the darkness, but I stayed where I was, watching Morgan. From the woods somebody took a shot at him, and I heard the bullet pass high up above us.

He walked unhurriedly to the edge of the rock nearest his boat and dropped the six feet down on to the *Sea Wraith*'s deck. A moment later the engines opened up with a steady roar.

I turned to follow the coxswain and ran straight into the arms of somebody in a gold-braided uniform.

"Oh," said Lieutenant Bergeron, "so it's you." He was breathing hard, and so were the men behind him, but I could hardly hear them for the beat of the *Sea Wraith*'s engines as she drew away into the quiet waters of that fatal natural harbour.

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" Yes," I said, trying to sound as though I'd expected Bergeron to be there. " It's me all right. Have you got half the army out to catch one man ? "

The lieutenant said without offence, " Very nearly. I mean to get him this time. If I'd known you were going to come on this trip with him I'd have warned you."

" That's all right," I said. " I suppose it was your idea to plant Mr. Smith on him ? "

" Mr. Smith ? " Bergeron asked. " You mean Vacquier ? Yes, it was my idea. It worked, too."

" Not for Vacquier, or whatever his name was," I reminded him. I had one eye on the *Sea Wraith*. It was gathering speed rapidly.

Bergeron said, " No. But stool pigeons are unpleasant people at the best of times. I consider them expendable."

I looked out beyond the bay at the gunboats waiting in the lee of the islands. And I saw what I should have noticed before, if I hadn't been thinking of other things. Since we'd come through the gap in the rocks the wind had risen more than I'd realised. The mill-pond was gone. Instead, the sea was coming in with big, white-capped rollers—heavy-looking things that were even making the gunboats pitch and turn. I had a sudden memory of the iron hard punch of small ripples on the hull of the *Sea Wraith*—Morgan's warning about bad weather. And I realised with complete certainty that the M.G.B. could never live in such a sea. Morgan, by that time, must have realised it too.

One of the customs men had brought Bergeron a signal lamp and the lieutenant aimed it at the point where the rocks made their opening to the sea.

I said, " What's that for ? "

" To signal to the men I've got out there." He was squinting through the sights, intent on the job in hand. " They've got chains across the bottom. I'm telling them to pull them up to make a boom. Then our Captain Morgan will be caught like a goldfish in a bowl."

He was thorough, was Bergeron. And for some reason I wished I was out of the whole thing. I don't know what I felt about Morgan at that moment. I knew he was a crook, and that he was an anachronism with no place and perhaps no right in the twentieth century. But for all that there was something about the man. He deserved a better fate than that of a goldfish in Bergeron's bowl.

The *Sea Wraith* was half-way to the point by this time, gathering speed.

" Don't be a fool," I said to Bergeron. " He can't take that

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boat into that sea. Look for yourself—he's seen it. He's coming back." He was, too. Morgan had swung the helm over, bringing the M.G.B.'s bows away from the point, back into the bay. I held my breath, feeling slightly sick. I didn't know myself what Morgan was up to—whether the sight of the sea had really scared him or not. All I did know was that I wanted that way out clear for him if he wanted to take it.

Bergeron said, "You're right. He's coming back." He dropped the signal lamp and I knew what he was thinking. He'd get his goldfish alive that way. And he wanted Morgan alive.

But watching the *Sea Wraith* I knew that Morgan wasn't coming back.

I think perhaps he'd seen the men on the point and guessed they had something waiting for him. Anyway, all he was playing for was more speed. He brought the M.G.B. round in a tight turn, the bow wave swinging out white to the side of him. I could hear the engines even over the wind. With the speed mounting every second, Morgan kept his boat in the turn, swinging it round till it was again pointing to the open sea. Then he headed flat out for the gap in the rocks.

Bergeron said something rude and snatched up his signal lamp again, but I knew it was too late. Nothing could have stopped Morgan by that time—only the gunboats waiting for him and they were going to be too slow off the mark to beat the sea. He was on his course and he kept to it, and as he went between the rocks he must have been doing all of forty-five knots. Then he was in open water.

"Lend me your glasses," I said to Bergeron. He looked at me queerly and handed them over without a word. I lifted them and focused them on the *Sea Wraith* as she hit the first of the big waves.

Even at that distance I could feel the shock of it lifting the lightly built boat. If it had been slower it might have cut through it, but up on its step, with the bow high out of the water, it didn't have a chance.

The whole vessel seemed to heave itself into the air, and then the bow dropped as the wave smashed into it somewhere amidships. The screws must have come out of the water then, because the sound of the engines went higher. Then the M.G.B. was ploughing on at undiminished speed, through the next wave, shipping most of it green across the foredeck.

"He's away," Bergeron said flatly.

"No," I said.

The *Sea Wraith* was almost level with the first of the gunboats by this time, and I saw the spray rise as Morgan swung her away

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to the north. In that sea it was a suicidal thing to do, but even so he nearly got away with it. Then the whole vessel seemed to hesitate.

At that distance it was impossible to see what had happened. Perhaps she had just become waterlogged with the sea she'd shipped. Perhaps the sheer speed of her against the waves had opened her seams. But the next time I saw the *Sea Wraith* she was low in the water. A wave broke right over the superstructure, and then another followed it. Then there was nothing. Only the sea and the moonlight out there.

"Thanks," I said, and gave the glasses back to Bergeron. I was glad he'd gone out like that. If he'd lived back in the old days capture might have meant something for him, because at least a man had a chance to show himself off to advantage at a public hanging. But the Kidds and the Morgans would have hated a French prison. And my Morgan would have been lucky to get away with only that.

Lieutenant Bergeron said, "Like all the English, you are a sentimentalist." He offered me one of his vile cigarettes. "At least you met him. That was what you wanted, wasn't it?"

I thought of the big black beard and the white teeth laughing in the wheel-house as the seas came smashing over the polished deck.

What was he at the moment he died, I wondered. What part of that queer, twisted personality was uppermost? The forty-year-old man or the schoolboy who couldn't grow up?

"Yes, I knew him all right," I said, and lit the cigarette with distaste. It was cold now, and the wind had brought the rain with it. I began to wonder if I could get a lift back to the nearest town in Bergeron's car.

* * *

FRANTIC HAY

A Hula dancer claimed she could teach the young man in Hawaii the dance in three easy lessons. As he was leaving for home the next day, he arranged to take a correspondence course.

Lesson Number One arrived: "Go out, plant a crop of grass, harvest it, and wrap it around your waist."

He did so. Then came Lesson Number Two. "Go out, plant another crop of grass. Harvest it, and wrap it around your waist."

Somewhat crestfallen and cropbound, he awaited Lesson Number Three. It contained the key: "Now rotate your crops." *From The Tatler and Bystander*

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MEDICI MIRROR

"I'd smash the thing," he said, "or melt it down to honest metal. But you can't melt down dreams . . ."

by E. C. HORNSBY

IT was over a year after John Fulton's retirement before I took advantage of his invitation to spend a week-end with him at Melchester, where he had been born and to which he had retired to spend the remainder of his days.

Perhaps you know how these things are. He had been a very good chief and had made the way smooth for me to take over from him. We had spent every working day for thirty years together. We had always lunched together, too, discussing every subject under the sun—except, of course, "shop." Yet we had never visited each other's houses and never intruded on each other's private lives, so that in that direction we were almost strangers.

At parting, however, it was natural enough for him to press me to go and see him and for me to agree as readily, as though, the common plank of business having broken between us, we were anxious to find another to bridge the gap.

But life continually rearranges its pattern; the business world closed over John, even whilst every day I was handling documents of every description bearing his handwriting.

Then he sent me a brief note of reminder and with an acute sense of my own neglect I wrote back and fixed the following week-end.

He met me at the railway station, the same old John but a little slower and more expansive, as befits a man free to "stand and stare" and no longer hitched to somebody else's waggon. He had come on foot, for he had never been car-minded, saying he preferred to use his feet and his thoughts at the speed God had ordained.

As my host he insisted on taking my small suitcase and we walked through the lovely old Cathedral town together. What a perfect setting it made for John, and how much of its atmosphere he had brought with him to the teeming streets of the city. And there, now, was its peace in his clear untroubled eyes, its wisdom in his fine broad forehead, its grace of age in his quiet unflurried manner.

He had a tall, narrow house of rich, mellow brick, overlooking the Cathedral close, a house full of fragrance. How one can

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judge a house and its occupants by the first breath one takes in it! Outside, the shadow of the Cathedral stretched softly over grass of a vivid green; beyond was the lake with the slowly gliding swans. Inside the house there was the same quiet and dignified beauty. A place to sit and think in, to dream a while and to rise and go—content.

We dropped into our old, undemanding familiarity at once.

He inquired after his old colleagues and what changes had taken place, but less eagerly than I should have thought. I realized that already we were dropping away from him even as he had dropped away from us. Perhaps he read my thought, for presently he remarked on it.

"You know," he said, "one has to realize that every now and then life turns a corner, and everything that went before is blotted out—gone. One has to go on in new places, with new people. One remembers the old but cannot take it on into the new. It's fatal to try."

When I asked him how he spent his time he showed me with great pride his various hobbies. He had a workshop and there were many examples of his handiwork about. He had few tools and those of the simplest. He was not very skilled with them, but the expedients he employed to cover up his deficiencies were most ingenious and for his sake they acquired an attraction that mere skill would never have commanded.

In the garden he was on surer ground; even had I not known him so well I think I could have told you the manner of man he was from his garden. It was the sort of plot in which his ancestors must have taken their evening rest, just as we did with the smoke curling lazily away from our pipes, and in the distance the smack of bat on ball where the Cathedral scholars were busy at the nets.

"How about the winter?" I questioned.

"I have another hobby," he said happily. "I've turned into a bit of a collector."

"What sort?" I asked, for this was a new departure for him.

"Anything," he answered. "Junk mostly, I suppose. I don't know anything about it. I go rooting about in the old shops and if I see anything that takes my fancy I buy it. I have a room full of stuff upstairs. I'll show you when we go in."

So after supper we climbed to a room at the top of the house. It had benches round the wall with many lockers fashioned ingeniously out of old boxes. From these he produced a bewildering variety of things. I suppose quite honestly one could only call them rubbish and yet each had its own particular novelty and quaintness. He expounded the particular points of each and chuckled over them so delightfully that I fell into a kind of enchantment.

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Presently he came across a parcel on one of the benches and, cutting the string, he pulled away the paper.

"I bought this yesterday," he explained, "I liked the shape of it."

He tore off the last of the paper, revealing a mirror. It had a wooden base and was pivoted between two carved uprights. The frame of the mirror was, however, metal and at one time it had been gilded. It was fashioned into a design of intertwined flowers. The glass was heart-shaped and at the top a bee, hung on fine wires, trembled over the blossom.

"Isn't it a nice shape?" he said. "You know there's *line* in the curve of that mirror," and he swept his hands caressingly through the air as though following the outline. "I suppose at one time there were stones of various kinds forming the flower centres. Look, you can see where they were. All gone now, unfortunately, or else I shouldn't have got it for a couple of quid."

I examined it.

"Do you think it was a hand-mirror once?" I asked. "It looks as though it was put into the frame later. It probably had a handle at the base here and it was broken off at some time or other."

"Yes," he agreed, feeling about with his finger. "Yes, you're right; you can feel the broken edge. It must have been a very heavy affair to hold up by hand."

"You probably had a servant to hold it for you," I suggested.

"I wonder what period it is?" he said. "I have a feeling it's Italian workmanship. What do you think?"

"Didn't they tell you?"

"No; I bought it from an old junk-shop; rusty old bikes, marble-topped wash-stands and all that."

"I could find out from Higby," I said, "he's one of the sidesmen with me at St. Luke's and has something to do with the British Museum."

"No, don't bother," he replied. "I like to build up my own atmosphere. I wonder if I could make a handle for it. Be rather fun to try, wouldn't it? Let's see if it'll come out of the frame."

He fiddled about for some time and then went in search of oil-can and screw-driver to deal with the rusted screws. I amused myself looking at various other items of his collection and then, going back to the mirror, I moved it with difficulty to and fro on its pivots.

"What's the matter?" asked Fulton, coming in behind me.

"I think there must be a flaw in the glass," I replied, looking up with the mirror in my hands. "I moved it backwards and forwards and something seemed to run across its surface like a spider. It made me jump for a moment. I suppose there's a flaw somewhere although I can't see it now."

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" Let me look," he said, taking the glass from me and trying it at various angles. " There doesn't seem to be anything," he said dubiously, and rubbed the back of his hand over the surface. " Gosh," he exclaimed the next second, snatching his hand away and revealing a long fine scratch across the back of it. He put it to his mouth and sucked at it.

" There's a little spike of glass sticking up here," I said, looking at it full under the light and holding my glasses down to form a magnifying lens. " You can hardly see it." I felt at it cautiously with my finger-tip. " It's as sharp as a needle," I reported. " It must have been a tiny blow-hole when the glass was cast."

" Anyway, that's what you saw, so now we know," said Fulton, still sucking vigorously. " Glad to have cleared up the mystery for you."

" Yes," I agreed, still a little doubtfully. " I thought it was a bit lower down than that, though. Still, you're probably right."

" I'll have a go at that during the week," said Fulton, putting the mirror away.

I wasn't looking particularly, you understand, but as his hand closed on it again I had the impression of something black and very quick and active running across the surface.

I liked the rest of John's collection, but somehow or other I didn't like that mirror ; just a feeling, that's all, such as you get with certain people, but it's surprising how right those impressions often are.

It could have been only a month or so later that I had a letter from John asking me to spend another week-end with him. There was a curious note of urgency in his invitation, and so of course, I went.

John was looking as well as ever but his manner was quieter and graver. In the old days I should have said he'd got something on his mind.

" How are things ? " I probed as we walked along.

" Oh, very well," he said, abstractedly, " very well," and dropped into silence.

" How's the hand ? " I questioned.

" Hand ? " he repeated, absently.

" You remember last time I was here you scratched it on that mirror and the following day it had swollen and pained you a bit ? "

" Oh, yes," he answered. " I remember. I put some stuff on it. It didn't give any further trouble."

" Did you put a new handle on to that glass as you intended ? " I questioned.

" Yes," he said, in a flat voice. Then, with an effort as if realizing

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he was paying me scant attention, he resumed his normal manner.

I thought perhaps he had made a botch of the new handle, but when I saw it I was surprised. It was, frankly, far better than anything of which I should have thought him capable. Not only was the workmanship very good; the design itself was most unusual. The stems of the flowers that surrounded the glass now came down in a thick bunch to form the actual handle. Entwined amongst the stalks was a snake that coiled itself upwards towards the glass. Its uplifted head projected slightly above the bottom edge of the mirror as though the reptile was looking in at itself. He had given the snake a couple of tiny glittering eyes and it hung there as though fascinated by its own image.

"What on earth made you think of that?" was my first reaction, and he looked a little confused.

"The idea came to me," he said, "I wished afterwards it hadn't. I got to hate that thing, working on it day after day. Yet it came so easily. If I were fanciful I'd say it crawled out of the flowers on its own."

He put the glass down almost violently as if he detested the very sight of it. I noticed that he no longer kept it with the rest of his beloved junk.

After supper, when we were smoking together, I could feel him keep glancing over at me as though he wanted to tell me something and didn't know how to start.

"Something on your mind, John?" I said finally, and he replied as simply, "Yes, there is. But first of all, would you call me an imaginative man?"

"It depends what you mean by that," I said, cautiously. "If you mean do I think you're devoid of imagination the answer is certainly 'no'; but if you mean, as I think you do, are you the type whose imagination would run away with him, well then again I should say as definitely 'no.'"

He nodded as if satisfied.

"Of course," he said, thoughtfully, "it also depends on what you call imagination. I have an idea there's a good sort of imagination and a bad kind. For instance, the other day I was in my little room upstairs where I keep all my rubbish, as you call it. I'd been there all the afternoon for it had been raining. It suddenly came to me how like the room was to the play-room I had when I was a child; that was at the top of the house, too.

"Then I thought how really like a child I was still, sitting there playing with my toys, as though I'd travelled full circle and was coming back to where I started. I remembered how Mother used to come upstairs for me and take me off to bed. I was a sensitive child and she used to lie down with me for a bit until I dozed off, but

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that was a secret and nobody else knew. Then I looked up and Mother was standing there."

He remained silent for a moment before he continued, "There was nothing spooky about it; nothing terrifying or unnatural. Goodness knows why we always think of such things as being that. She just looked at me as quietly and lovingly as she always used to; just as I hope she'll come for me when I put aside my toys for ever."

He stopped again, deeply moved.

"That was what I call *good* imagination," he said. "Don't you think so?"

I nodded.

"Have you had an experience of the other kind?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I was going to tell you about it but I don't think I will. Instead I'd like to try a little experiment and use you as the guinea-pig. Would you mind very much? I promise you there's nothing very terrible in it. At least," he wound up, strangely, "not to you."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked suspiciously.

"I want you to put that mirror on the table by your bedside when you go to sleep tonight," he said. "Prop it up so that you can see the glass. You see I did a bit of the carving each night in bed before going off to sleep myself and it was then that I noticed—" he broke off. "No," he said, "I won't tell you—at least, not yet. I'd sooner see if it happens to you."

"I'll do it if it amuses you," I said, "but I don't see why sleeping in a room with a mirror should give me the same dreams as you. It *was* a dream, I take it?"

"That's what I want to find out," he replied.

So to please him I carted the thing upstairs with me, took a pile of books from a shelf and propped it up against them, feeling more than a little foolish as I did so.

The night sky overhead was quite light and as I turned over in bed to face the mirror I could see the stars reflected in it. Then I went off to sleep. When I awoke the glass was reflecting the pale sky of early morning.

"Sorry, John, old man," I thought, "I'm afraid I'm not the dreamy kind."

Then, so easily can imagination make fools of us, my heart missed a beat and I shrank back into the bedclothes, for I thought for a moment that that wretched snake had moved its head as though to lift itself higher.

It was nothing of the sort, of course, but out from its shadow ran something swift and active. It was a spider and it darted to and fro from side to side of the mirror spinning its web. There was nothing

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surprising in that. Greenery surrounded the open windows and no doubt it had come in from there to settle on the mirror. I watched for a long while its humped-bodied, long-legged, feverish activity, and marvelled that so much industry should be wasted.

"There's a lesson there," I thought, "start on a wrong premise and whatever you construct is worthless."

I began to think of men and schemes I had known every bit as foolish.

I must have dozed, for when I next opened my eyes the web was finished and the spider resting in the centre of it, which quivered slightly.

Then I had a funny idea that the insect was looking at me. I almost persuaded myself that I could see its eyes, unwinking and sinister. There was something filthy in the way it was sitting there waiting for its victim, something gloating and lip-licking. Here was no physical appetite, but a mental one, evil and perverted.

I felt a most unusual gust of anger. Ordinarily I have no particular objection to spiders but now, rising, I pulled a handkerchief from the breast-pocket of my coat where it was spread across the chair back, and, making a pad of it for my hand, I dabbed viciously at the spider, crushing it hard against the glass. Then I rubbed vigorously to and fro to wipe away all trace of the web it had built.

I removed the handkerchief and looked at my handiwork and didn't know which was stronger in me—bewilderment or something akin to sheer downright fright. The spider was still there and not a thread of its web had been disturbed.

With the unthinking courage of panic I put out a finger and scratched at the web; it puts my teeth on edge now to think of it, but my nail tapped against nothing but the cold glass.

Then I realized something, and looking closely at the spider confirmed my surmise. I was looking at the underside of its body. Its legs curved towards me. In some way it had got between the glass and the metal plate at the back, for this was not the more modern silvered type of mirror—it had a burnished metal reflector.

I jabbed with my finger again and again at the spider, thinking to frighten it off, but it clung motionlessly there. I think, however, it must have spat back a little poison at me. I must admit, however, that I do not know whether that is a characteristic of spiders. Anyway, a fine mist formed over the glass at that point until the insect was partly obscured by it.

I went back to bed pleased to think I had "laid" John's ghost so easily. Perhaps he had a "thing" about spiders and had not cared to investigate so closely.

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I plunged into sleep again, intent on making up for lost time, and awoke to the full light of a summer's day.

John, with sympathy for the wage-slave, always did me proud: breakfast and the Sunday papers were brought up to me and I was free to stay in bed as long as I liked.

Later John himself came in, looking more like John Bull than ever, with his sturdy shoulders and broad good-tempered face.

"Come on, John," I called, in high spirits. "I've found out all about your mirror for you."

He sat down on the side of the bed whilst I told him about it, his clear blue eyes intent upon me.

"Ah, so that's it, is it?" he said. He went over, examined the mirror and then brought it back to me.

"Look," he said.

The glass was quite clear; there wasn't a trace of spider or web.

"I—I must have dreamt it," I said, blankly.

He chuckled.

"Did you dream this?" he asked, picking up my rolled-up handkerchief from the floor.

"I suppose the thing's gone back into the frame," I said, trying to find a crack with my finger nail.

"And taken its web with it, eh?" commented John. I looked up at him for explanation.

"Oh, *I* can't explain it," he said, "but it's happened to me night after night. I swear I get up. I swear that that spider's behind the glass. But in the morning—it's as you see. But that wouldn't be so bad. I'd soon smash the thing and melt it down to honest metal again, for somehow or other I have no liking for it, beautiful as it is. But you can't melt down dreams, and every time I go back to bed again I dream. It varies, but in substance it's always the same . . .

"I'm in a room," he said. "It's not a very big room but it opens off a much larger one. In the bigger room there's a great bed with a canopy over it and steps leading up to it. There's a woman resting on it. She wears a sort of elaborate negligée and all manner of people keep coming and going as though she were holding some kind of court. She's obviously a person of considerable position for usually they back away from her, bowing. I reckon it's a levee she's holding, because I remember reading that originally that meant an informal audience by the bedside before the personage had risen for the day.

"I fancy there's some event going to take place, for most of them seem to bring gifts. I only get glimpses of all this, of course, because I'm in the little room. I think it's a dressing-room, for there's a dressing-table with candles in holders on each side of the glass. On the table there are all sorts of little boxes and bowls—for cosmetics, I suppose—as well as brushes and combs and tweezers.

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"There's a little maid bustling about amongst it, putting out dresses and things. She's a charming creature. I don't suppose she's more than fifteen. She wears those black stay things with the cross laces. She's so full of life, so eager to please, so innocent. You couldn't imagine anybody being unkind to her."

He stopped.

"I don't think even *they* meant it," he said. "It was an accident, I swear."

He went on again after a moment's silence.

"There's a tremendous stir outside. The lady gets up. The little maid runs to the door and peeps. All the men bow, their swords sticking out under the tails of their short cloaks. The ladies curtsey. And in comes a little dark woman, an Italian I should think. She's not young but she's as supple as a cat. The lady in the negligée curtsies very low to her and kisses her hand, but the dark lady raises her and kisses her cheek.

"They talk together, and then one of the gentlemen steps forward with a mirror. It's that mirror of mine or one very like it, but now it's glittering with jewels and very beautiful indeed. The dark lady gives it to the younger woman and everybody crowds as near as they dare to see. There's a lot more civilities and then off goes the dark lady and the younger woman looks after her, not too pleasantly, I fancy. Then she sees the maid peeping out of the closet and calls her over and gives the mirror to her.

"The child brings it into the dressing-room, and then, being young and pretty, of course, she must needs look at herself in it."

He broke off.

"It's such a nice young face," he said, "so gay and so gentle. It makes me think of the daughter I might have had. I'd have liked her to look like that. But as she looks the glass gets a little misty with her breathing and she rubs the back of her hand across to clear it, just as I did, and the same thing happens. She scratches her hand and puts it to her mouth.

"Then the lady, her mistress, comes in. I don't like her, although I suppose she's handsome in the style they admired in those days—round eyes, round face, small fat mouth and short upper lip. But I think she looks peevish and secret. The little maid runs about helping her on with her dress. Then she stands holding the mirror for the lady to adjust her toilette. You remember, you said that somebody would have to hold it for you?

"It's then that it happens. I see the little girl turn deadly pale, the mirror trembles and then down she goes and the glass crashes to the ground beside her and the handle snaps off."

"That's how you knew the design," I cried.

"Yes," he answered, "it nearly always finishes up by my foot."

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"And the girl?" I questioned.

"I never look at her now; not after the first time. She's dead, of course. It's like seeing a bed of daffodils trampled on. Yet, do you know, that other woman never as much as gives her a glance, but pulls her dress out of reach and stands glaring at the door through which the dark lady went. Then—I come away," he concluded simply.

"And it's always the same?" I asked.

"More or less. Sometimes I'm there longer and go all through it. Sometimes I only get a glimpse of part of it. Now that I know what's going to happen I want to call out to the kid to warn her, as they used to shout out from the gallery of the theatre, but, of course, she wouldn't hear me, and you can't alter what has happened."

"Have you any idea of the period?" I questioned.

"It looks Elizabethan," he said, doubtfully, "—ruffs, padded sleeves and wide spreading skirts; but I don't think it is England, the men look too dark and small-boned. It might be France but I swear that cat-like woman is Italian—you never see such eyes outside Italy."

"Would you let me talk to Higby?" I said. "I'm sure he can hunt up something."

"Yes," he agreed, "certainly. After all he can only think that old John Fulton's gone soft in the head to grieve over a child who's nothing but a dream, for I do grieve, you know."

"At least I can now confirm the beginning," I said thoughtfully.

"Oh, there's an ending to it as well," he said, "which I haven't told you yet. The handle goes one way, the mirror the other, and as it falls I get a glimpse in the glass. There's a broken web falling apart in it and a spider scurrying away to its hiding place."

It was not many weeks later that I telephoned Fulton and invited myself down for another week-end.

"You have some news then?" he said as he greeted me at the station.

"Yes," I replied. "Higby turned up trumps all right. After supper I'll tell you about it. We'll have the mirror down as witness."

It rested on the table between us when I began.

"According to Higby it seems that a mirror like this was made for Catherine of Medici by René, her perfumer and poisoner. Poison, you remember, was the lady's favourite way of disposing of inconvenient people.

"The mirror was intended as a wedding present to a certain great lady who was about to become allied to a member of the royal house itself. It seems that Catherine did not look with much favour on this union, hence the present.

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"Presents from the Medicis were dangerous things. This was ingenious indeed. The glass was coated with a clear colourless poison. As a person looked in the glass the condensation from their breath caused the poison to discolour so that it looked like mist. The natural reaction was to rub one's hand across to clear it. A tiny barb was set in the glass which tore the skin. Not only did one rub the poison into the wound with the same movement but invariably one put the hand to one's mouth and sucked more poison in that way. I'm afraid your little girl-friend intruded into matters never intended for her."

I have seldom seen John so inflamed with anger.

"The devils," he cried, hoarse with rage, "the cowardly murderous devils!"

He picked up the glass and it shook in his hand.

"What was this man René like?" he demanded. "Did Higby tell you?"

"He showed me a picture," I answered. "He was a hairy furtive little wretch, almost hump-backed, with a round fat body and grotesquely long legs and arms. You might say he looked more like a huge spider than a man."

John nodded.

"I thought as much," he said, grimly. "Well, we'll settle this devilish thing once and for all."

He put the mirror on the floor and drove his foot down on it with all his might. The glass shattered into fragments.

We both cried out together; something small, black, and feverishly active scuttled away across the floor with incredible speed.

But John was quicker. With one bound he was after it and his foot crashed down full upon it. He stood grinding it into the stone flags of the floor. I remembered what a respect he always had for life and that never before had I seen him kill any of God's creatures.

But there was a look of grim justice on his face that proclaimed that he did not look on this thing as a creature of God's at all.

"Well," he said, finally, "that's waited nearly four hundred years, but I think it's done at last."

He lifted his foot and looked down at the stone. Then he looked at the underside of the shoe itself.

There was nothing there.

* * *

I had always imagined that Cliché was a suburb of Paris, until I discovered it to be a street in Oxford.

PHILIP GUEDALLA, *Some Historians*

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VENUS ADORNED

No fault in women to lay on
The tincture of vermilion,
And there to give the cheek a dye
Of white, where Nature doth deny

ROBERT HERRICK

Before a toilet that shone like the altar of Notre Dame des Victoires, Helen was seated in a little dressing-gown of black and heliotrope. The coiffeur Cosmé was caring for her scented chevelure, and with tiny silver tongs, warm from the caresses of the flame, made delicious intelligent curls that fell as lightly as a breath about her forehead and over her eyebrows, and clustered like tendrils round her neck.

Her three favourite girls, Pappelarde, Blanchemains and Loreyne, waited immediately upon her with perfume and powder in delicate flacons and frail cassolettes, and held in porcelain jars the ravishing paints prepared by Châteline for those cheeks and lips that had grown a little pale with anguish of exile.

AUBREY BEARDSLEY, *Under The Hill*

Nature I loved—

Comming to kisse her lyps, (such grace I found)
Me seemed I smelt a gardin of sweet flowres :
that dainty odours from them threw around
for damzels fit to decke their lovers bowres.
Her lips did smell lyke unto Gillyflowers,
her ruddy cheekes lyke unto Roses red :
her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures,
her lovely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred.

EDMUND SPENSER

—And next to Nature, Art

A rainy afternoon. At Number 26 Claremont Crescent, la Cabuchon is preparing herself to look her best when pouring out tea for Pelham Clutterwick, due to return exhausted from the city.

She is standing in front of a mirror. It is a large mirror, tilted at the perfect angle, gracing a commodious dressing-table, standing on a rich carpet, covering the floor of a spacious bedroom. The bed has a canopy and the ceilings are definitely God-fearing.

La Cabuchon smiles at her reflection as she tucks a little rose

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behind her ear. Who would recognise in this chic vision, stiffened with black taffeta, lightened at the wrists with white lace, and sown all over with black buttons, the meek French governess of but three months back? Gone is the apologetic shawl, the deferential clasp of the hands, the acquiescing nod. In fact there is only the face left to be attended to.

La Cabuchon turns to her dressing-table. It is as well-stocked with small porcelain jars of various cosmetics as Mrs. Creamery's still-room shelves are stocked with large jars of various preserves. As her fingers fly from jar to jar, rejecting and selecting, the better to please Pelham Clutterwick, the little lids fly open and reveal inside the sage advice with which the manufacturers counselled so many upper-middle class dressing-tables. "Moderation," said the rouge. "Discretion," advised the face-powder. "Resignation," pleaded the wrinkle-remover. "Prudence," warned the lip rouge. This last carried an annotation in la Cabuchon's own hand. "Get it in writing."

CARYL BRAHMS *and* S. J. SIMON,
"Don't Mr. Disraeli!"

Lovelocks

I watched the Lady Caroline
Bind up her dark and beauteous hair;
Her face was rosy in the glass,
And 'twixt the coils her hands would pass,
White in the candleshine.

Her bottles on the table lay,
Stoppered, yet sweet with violet;
Her image in the mirror stooped
To view those locks as lightly looped
As cherry-boughs in May.

The snowy night lay dim without,
I heard the Waits their sweet song sing;
The windows smouldered keen with frost;
And still she twisted, sleeked and tossed
Her beauteous hair about.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Memory, and Other Poems*

Highland Fling

Upon the whole the situation of Ballymartin is very fine—at the House, I saw a Visitor, old maid, dress'd out very smart and with 3 Rounds of the deepest rouge on each cheek—I did not expect to see such *refined coquetry* in the Highlands—

EUGENIA WYNNE, *Diary, September 22nd*, 1806

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Public Enemy

Beautie is a needless and superfluous thing . . . a great impediment to chastitie . . . that Lacivious, Odious, Effeminate, and Unchristian, Frizling, Colouring, Platting, Frouncing . . .

WILLIAM PRYNNE, 1600-69

Retouched

Thy flattering picture, Phryne, is like thee,
Only in this, that you both painted be.

JOHN DONNE, *Phryne*

Jungle Venom

With a steady hand Aimée . . . brushed into her hair some odorous drops from a bottle labelled: "Jungle Venom"—*From the depth of the fever-ridden swamp*, the advertisement had stated, *where juju drums throb for the human sacrifice, Jeanette's latest exclusive creation* Jungle Venom *comes to you with the remorseless stealth of the hunting cannibal.*

Thus fully equipped for a domestic evening, her mind at ease, Aimée waited for Mr. Joyboy's musical "Hallo, there!" from the front door. She was all set to accept her manifest destiny.

EVELYN WAUGH, *The Loved One*

To Gild the Lily

Let Prigs and Primitives delight—
Though no one still supposes
That Prigs and Primitives are right—
In shiny cheeks and noses.
Whate'er the moralists have said
(And he who runs may read it)
I rather like a touch of red—
On lips that do not need it . . .

Leave Nature's crudity to those
Who'll take it, willy-nilly.
I study to perfume the rose
I like *to gild the lily.*
And you, my Love, as I have said—
And I've no cause to doubt it—
Can safely add a touch of red,
Who are so sweet without it.

JACQUES REVAL, *Maquillage*

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GAUNTLET OF FLAME

As the burning sky urged flight, he reached backwards into memories of coolness and beauty

by DOROTHY COTTRELL

ON his eightieth birthday, Andrew McNair was perhaps the most widely respected man of the southern world. As John Bull was for England, he was for Australia both a symbol and a synonym; so that in political cartoons his blunt-bearded and wide-shouldered old figure, with the allegorical fat lamb beneath its arm, often represented the Commonwealth.

Thrice a minister, many times his country's delegate in the councils of the nations, he was quoted alike in the world's press and beside the camp fires of the long Australian roads. Occasionally a thorn in the flesh to his own party, he was referred to even in the mouths of his political enemies, with affectionate respect, as "Old Andy." He was that most rare phenomenon, the kindly regarded multi-millionaire; the old Lion of the South, earthy and sharp-tongued adviser of kings and governments.

Ten weeks after his eightieth birthday, he was charged—and no man was ever more courteously or respectfully charged—with lunacy. While in the private opinion of his relatives' lawyer little else could be said for McNair's relatives, it seemed certain that in the bringing of the charge they for once were right.

So astounding indeed had been Old Andrew's actions in the past ten weeks that they gave something of pathos to the persisting twinkle in his very blue eyes.

And the eminent physicians and jurists before whom he came found it touching that for once he had chosen to dress formally and wear his honours, so that the decorations of the nations blazed upon his substantial chest.

"Gentlemen," Old Andrew said, "I have never heard the charge that a man has bats in the belfry more exquisitely expressed. Accept my thanks and let us get down to the facts of the case."

The chief legal representative of the McNair relatives rose.

"Gentlemen, while the action was trivial in comparison with what came later, on the twenty-fourth of April Mr. Andrew McNair suddenly left his home with two pounds three and sixpence in his pocket and carrying a roll of blankets—"

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"And a .22 rifle, a fishing-line and a leg of cold roast mutton," Andrew interrupted, lighting his pipe.

"Did you not realize that a mere curt note to the effect that you would 'be absent on personal business for an indefinite period' must seriously alarm your relatives?"

"I did," Andrew said.

"My general manager's limited powers of attorney enabled him to pay them nothing beyond their regular if, in my sincere belief, quite generous allowances."

"Why did you go, Mr. McNair? Please consider your reply!"

Andrew fingered his pipe, considering.

"To think of life and death. Perhaps 'to find the vanished fields of youth again.' To see if the little fish still come up to the bores on cold nights. To review a purely selfish problem of vanity and sentiment."

He had sat alone on his birthday at his desk in the homestead of the pastoral property that had been his first great landholding and was still his favourite. Before him lay a letter in which he had refused further payment of debts for the most worthless of his nephews; another enclosing a cheque for one of his nieces, "Not because I believe your reasons for needing it, my dear, but as a tribute to the quality of your fiction."

There was also a long news cutting telling of the death in England of an eminent bishop whom Andrew had regarded as the stupidest and most hidebound and at the same time the finest man he had ever known.

He had quarrelled with the bishop for thirty years; in person when the circumstances of their lives permitted it, by letter and cable when the world lay between. The bishop had also been the last human being to whom he, Andrew, had been of intense importance as a man. Putting down the cutting, he knew that he was now as lonely a man as there was in the world.

At four-thirty on the afternoon of his birthday he walked out of his house by the back door. The fine wool blanket in its oiled-silk cover was snug on his shoulders, his worn quart pot and billy were strapped outside the rolled swag, his water-bag swung at his side. It had been thus, save for a difference in the quality of blanket and cover, that, as a young Scot, he had first walked into the immensity of Australia.

Walking late while the promise of first frost made the sky a silver shield of stars above black trees, an old man tramping alone, he was the most painfully sentient thing in the great field of night. But about him stirred the furred and feathered life of the land, and he smiled because, as always, he felt a kinship with it, and this

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had been his prime bone of contention with his friend, the bishop. He was sorry that he had called the bishop a conceited old idiot and a stuffed surplice, for whatever came after, the bishop knew it now. And it was Andrew's private theory that the bishop might be perhaps astonished to find heaven a less episcopally select spot than that truly good man had expected.

"Man is distinguished from the animal world in that he only strives with himself, he only has conscience!" the bishop had thundered.

Yet it had been animal conscience that had caused Andrew to give up the very great joy of hunting for sport—old-men kangaroos, to be more accurate. He remembered them when the land was opened, fierce and beautiful creatures, confident in the power of splendid muscle and great chest, defiantly standing guard as their does fled.

Once Andrew had lain by a 'roo trail as another man hunted, and had seen an old-man 'roo wheel in this way. The great, deer-like eyes were rolling, the proudly curved chest was shaken by the thumping of the panicked heart, but still the creature stood royally, a block between the hunter and the fleeing does. The hunter's shot dropped the great kangaroo within ten feet of Andrew's cover. To Andrew it was conscience that had held the great creature there.

"Only man can love—" the bishop had contended. Andrew had seen a wood duck break from her tree-nest as a swamp was swept by fire, seen her circle madly and rush back to spread futile wings over downed ducklings—and die in the flame. The duck had known that to return was to die. She had returned because she could not let her ducklings die alone.

There was heavy frost on the grass when he awoke next morning, so that all the sharp shadows were blue where he had made his camp in the wild garden of couch grass lawns and sparkling box saplings beside an artesian well. Andrew washed his face in the water that was still steaming from the bore, and the rippling small stream was filled with the brightness of little fish that had come up to seek a warm night, free from the danger of frost.

Then, his face stinging with hot water and frost, he took a brown-crusted johnny cake from the ashes of last night's fire, blew off the ashes and buttered the hot and rich interior of the cake. While his tea boiled on the fierce coals that glowed deeper beneath the ash, he fried bacon to gold and brown-pink deliciousness, and began his breakfast as the sun sparkled in the icy air and magpies and butcher-birds sang about him in the dead mulga trees.

In the next weeks he fished like a boy in brown rivers, re-

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studied the ways of ants and watched the splendid formations of clouds. Or he walked all day with some old swagman who talked of why his life had failed, or with some very young man who talked of why his life would succeed. In six weeks he saw the dust haze of Carpentaria. And where the first Gulf grass verged on the roads he had the company of a middle-aged swagman.

"Know this country?" the swagman asked.

Andrew answered, "I used to know it."

"This used to be the big droving route to the north-west," the swagman said. "Old Andy McNair used to bring fine horses out here for the stations and go back with cattle. McNair's Pad comes in through the ironstone hills over there."

Andrew asked, "Is the native well still there? In the ridges to the south of the grass track before you come to the flats?"

"If it is, I didn't know it! Would have found it handy when the river was dry . . . Young widow has the land Old Andy used to use for resting his cattle. Widow of an airman who got killed in the war. Has a boy and they have their hearts set on staying on the land. Pretty girl with red hair. Used to ride into town with the kid behind her on a wall-eyed old horse, but folks say the horse up and died. Thieves and crocodiles got her sheep. Folks say she pretty near starves."

"Where does she have her homestead?" Andrew asked. "There used to be a big clump of gums on the flats."

"You do know this country, all right! That's the place she has her hut. Hope she has the Gulf grass burned off round the homestead. Hard for a woman and a boy to burn off this country alone, but it's a fire-trap if it goes, and lightning can start it any old time—though the storms should be over for this year. But till you see this stuff go, you've never seen a fire."

"I have seen it burn," Andrew said. "I think I will say good-bye to you now. You were right when you told me this morning that I am getting old for the roads."

"There's good fishing in the hole in the river right here," the swagman said. "Good flat place for a camp too." He hesitated, looking at the slim roll of Andrew's swag. "You shouldn't be running round like this, grandpa! I've got a pound in my pocket I was saving for a spree. Here! You take it and get yourself another blanket!"

"Thank you," Andrew said, leaving the swagman unenlightened as to differences in blankets. "Thank you, and good luck to you!"

He had planned to go on a long way before stopping for the night on this, his particular and private journey into memory; with old comrades, with the woman he had loved.

For he had said to her, "What would you like for our honey-

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moon, Margaret?" And she had laughed and answered, "To ride! Always when one rides one has to go home. This time let us keep riding, let us go north and north and north, across the hills and across the plains and into the Gulf grass and on to the north! When night comes, we can stop, knowing that in the morning we shall go on again, until we reach the sea!"

He wanted to stand again by the glitter of the Gulf where he had stood with her and to draw strength from her memory for the balance of his life on earth. But against his will he thought of the girl and the child who were trying to work the property on the great grass flats. A red-haired girl with courage.

He was held back by his conscience—the conscience of man. A circumstance that would be highly pleasing to the bishop, for here the bishop had a talking point. Man had outstepped the little people of the woods and fields in that only man could feel responsibility for lives unknown to him, for creatures whom he had never seen and of whom he had heard by chance.

Andrew used a green branch to sweep a fine, floor-smooth place by the river bank and watched the sudden, cherry blossom snow on dead trees as the corella parrots came in to drink. Tomorrow he would unwillingly go back to the settlement where the girl and the child had ridden on the wall-eyed horse, and would check on their situation.

A talk at the store, a few arrangements with the local bank manager should take care of the small tragedy. Most certainly he was not going to become personally involved. He had the very rich man's regretful knowledge of the uselessness of personal charity, of the endlessness and, in many cases, the spuriousness of the demands upon it. He had no intention of meeting girl or child. But he would see that someone got them out of their powder-keg of dry grass—if they were still in it.

They even had him worrying until he was studying the sky. Fortunately, the swagman was right and electrical storms were almost unknown at this season of the year. And while there was some cumulus cloud round the horizon, none showed signs of lightning and there was none to north or west.

Andrew surrendered to the beauty and peace of the river. He was irrationally pleased by the gift of the swagman's pound. And presently he was eating a crisp-fried and snowy-fleshed fish that was good as only the fish of the sparse rivers of dry lands are good—as if nature, having made fish a rarity, had put special art into the matter. His tea had extra flavour, too, and smelled pungently in the red of sunset. Before sleeping, he studied the sky again.

At midnight he was startled from the light sleep of the old by the rumbling of far thunder. Overhead the stars were faintly

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changed as if seen through a pink haze. Getting to his feet, he saw that he was marooned. A storm that should not have developed had swung into the north-west and fired the northern reaches of the great grass flats.

The body of the fire was still miles away, but it was already a great fire and growing, so that while, as yet, no flame topped the horizon, the wild variations of the sky, pulsing now rose, now orange, told of furious burning.

Tugging on his boots, Andrew appraised the situation bitterly. He was perfectly safe where he was; at worst he would simply have to spend a little time in the river, perhaps suffer a little from smoke. But for a man on foot to start to walk a narrow grass road across the face of an advancing fire was potential suicide.

If the girl and boy were still at the homestead, and if wide breaks had not been burned, the place was a natural death-trap. Yet if he attempted to reach them, he would almost certainly be caught on the grass road before he was halfway to the homestead. And if by a miracle he reached the homestead, what could he do?

His memory re-mapped the country that he had once known as no other man knew it. If the girl and the youngster were trying to make their way out, they would not have time to reach the stock route. If they did not know the country as he knew it, they would be trapped on the grass-walled road.

A countryside changed greatly in forty years, and the chance that, after years and by night, he could recognize the turn-off to the ironstone hills and the old well was very slight. But if he could meet the girl and the boy, he might still remember clearly enough to get them through.

"Damned fool!" Andrew said aloud, running to the river to fill his quart pot. Strapping on the quart, he began to walk rapidly west along the poorly defined track. It was as repulsive a trap to walk into as he had ever seen. And he smiled to find that a man was never too old for fear of the trap.

About him the tall, dead-grey grass that rose higher than his head pressed in upon the track, broken only by small, bush-like trees with broad, blue-grey leaves, veined and parched. Impalpable dust and powdered grass particles spurted from under his own steadily tramping feet, so that he could not get ahead of his self-made cloud of visible dryness. He choked from dust and lack of air. But as the first stir of air came over the grass tops, it was hot and smelled of smoke.

Terrified wallabies began to blunder across the trail; and his mind noted that at least this was not the season when the birds nested or when the wild things had their young. Then the grass

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tops were rustling in the still faint but steady draught of the fire's own wind, as the sky changed in ever wilder pulsations of light; now sullen blood and copper against flushed stars; now lit to quivering orange; now trailed by long curls of reeling golden smoke. The sky urged flight and the heat grew in the tiny slash of the road.

Because it was unlikely that he would keep his tryst by the Gulf, and he had better remember now if he would remember on this side of death, he reached backwards into memories of coolness and beauty.

He was a young man again and it was his wedding-night, and surely the fairest spring evening he had ever known. For across the dusty earth great rains had swept, and on the earth was a film of green so delicate that one saw it only as a shimmer in the rolling of the land.

With Margaret, on their first night together as man and wife, he made camp where a great swale lay between box forests; and the carpet for their feet was of small white daisies, dewy with newness and centred with small gold cushions, the flowers growing so thick that flower crowded flower as if the twilit earth was rippled with snow. It was as if the land knew how brief was its blooming and as if it could not pour enough passion of bloom into that briefness.

Seeking firewood, he had watched for the small plant whose name he had never known, a tiny thing whose whole growth was less than three inches in diameter, with flowers of warm white with a minute hint of gold, and a perfume sweeter than gardenias or roses or the heliotrope of any man-made garden. Finding a clump of the honeyed snow, he dug the plant out with his pocket-knife and set it in the basket of a fallen bird's nest; the whole sitting in the palm of his hand.

Taking it to her, he knelt on one knee where she was kneeling to unpack the supplies.

"Your wedding gift, madam! You have married a beggar, but he loves you."

She pushed back her brown hair as she took the gift and held it in both her hands before her face, breathing the amazing scent.

"On the contrary, I think that I am decidedly—immeasurably rich! If a woman finds what she wants in a man, she is so wealthy that while all things may be added unto her, it doesn't matter to her whether they are or not."

Later, lying beside her on the rough grey camp blankets and leaning on one elbow above her, he asked, "What do you most want in a man? I may not succeed, but I will try to achieve it."

One of her hands was beneath her head, so that her wrist formed

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a cushion for her soft-curled hair, but she raised her other hand and ran her fingers lightly over his face.

"Kindness, perhaps first. Courage, if a man has it, but to strive for courage if he has not got it. The sense of justice, if God has blessed him with the ability to be just. And honour—to mean what we say, and mean it honestly from the bottom of the heart. But it does not matter, for you are all the things I want, Andrew—in full measure."

He said, "For what it is worth, I will give you the world, Margaret! You will not always have poverty and only a little flowering plant for a gift."

She put her hands on either side of his face, looking up at his face against the great stars.

"Only continue to wish to give it to me and it does not matter in the least whether I get it."

He hoped that this had been truth, and not her sweetness, for she had died before he could put the riches of the world in her slim and strong brown hands. He, who later had had so much, had been able to give her only the loneliness of vast isolation, the great hardship of the wilderness as youth and poverty know it. He had given her love.

She had told him once, "If I should die, you are to marry again, Andrew. Only be sure she is very nice. It is very impertinent to worry about one's husband's second wife, but I worry a great deal about the abominable hussy. Remember, Andrew, if there is knowing afterwards, I could not bear you to be lonely, Andrew."

She had meant it with all the laughing generosity of her love.

He had never remarried. As in his art gallery he kept his finest picture—the Gauguin—alone and uncluttered on its wall, in his life he had chosen, coolly and with full knowledge of what he did, to keep the love of one woman alone upon the wall of consciousness.

He would not have altered his choice. Only old age had left him vulnerable to the fact that there remained no one to whom his life or death would be of more than public or financial interest. And tramping now under the terrifying sky, he grinned briefly to note how persistent was the vanity of man's desire that his safety or his present danger should be of keen moment to some other heart.

It also gave him pain that he had not solved—and now would never solve—that purely selfish problem of vanity and sentiment. For while the bulk of his fortune would very satisfactorily go to those charities of which he approved, he still shrank from the thought of that first and best loved of his landholdings falling into greedy or unknown hands.

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It had been Margaret's home when they pitched their tents in its first clearing. It had known good things. He would have liked it to go to someone to whom he himself was dear, who would have valued the property itself perhaps a little more because of his, Andrew's, memory.

On the grass road the light was now like day, except that no day had this infernal sky of rolling golden smoke against the dark. To the south, grass and ridges were lit as if by some unearthly stage light. Mounting heat sent sweat streaming over his face and body, and he wished that he dared to fire the southern grass flats to give himself the doubtful protection of smouldering but burned-over ground to which to retreat as the fire reached the road. But he dared not fire them, for if the girl and the child had tried for the hills, they could be caught in this surge of new flame.

Overhead the smoke ran thicker and closer to the earth. Then he could hear the steady roar of the fire like the sound of a great river, but higher pitched than the rumblings of a flood, so that it was a vast sound, yet filled with a million consuming cracklings and hissings.

Fiercely sweet smoke was driving low across the road itself as he saw the little group coming towards him—a young woman and a boy, their heads bent, their mouths covered by handkerchiefs against the smoke, but neither in foolish panic nor dawdling.

The boy's arm was protectively about his mother, and his finely shaped, fair-curled young head was set determinedly on his shoulders. Beside them an old dog was making heavy going of it, and as Andrew watched, the girl stooped and her hand touched the dog in swift encouragement.

"Hullo!" Andrew shouted above the sounds of fire. And they looked up in surprise at his nearness. They had already come through great heat, for their faces streamed with sweat and their clothes smelt of singeing.

"We must get to the main road!" the girl said, lowering the handkerchief. "You can't go west!"

She put her hand on his arm with the same protective guidance she had shown towards the dog. Andrew put his own hand on her shoulder. "I know this country. We haven't time to get to the road. Used to be an old well in the ironstone over there. At least the fire—won't be so fierce there. You follow me!"

She regarded him uncertainly.

Andrew said steadily, "It's a poor chance, but it's our only chance. Follow me!"

The boy's clear young voice said, "I think he's right, mother." He looked at Andrew. "You're sure?"

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" Damn it ! I'm the man who found the well ! It won't matter if I'm sure or not if we stand here. Come on ! "

The girl stammered, " The grass looks terribly high. The well may have gone dry."

" The hills are our only chance. Do you want to roast, girl ? "

The boy said, " The fire is very close to the road ahead, mother. He is right ! " He put his arm about her again. " We'll get you through ! " He looked at Andrew. " Won't we ? "

They plunged into the entangling grass. " It's not far," Andrew said. Behind them the fire was a leaping sea of light.

The boy said, " Bluey can't manage." Between them, the girl and the boy picked up the dog. Andrew fought down a path through the Gulf grass.

Nothing was familiar in the wild radiance. Then the country changed. The grass became lower and the ragged, resinous clumps of spinifex stabbed at their staggering legs.

As sand gave way to ironstone, he believed that he was right. The bulbous forms of bottle trees further encouraged him. But he was looking for the red bluff . . . There, thank God, it was ! The old well should be in the hop bushes over there.

He cast ahead, unable to be certain, for the vegetation had changed with the years. Then he almost stepped into the hand-chipped, rock-lipped hole. His torch showed muddy margins and rank water seven feet below. It was a repulsive shelter, but nonetheless a shelter.

He shouted for the girl and the boy. Behind them the fire was already roaring across the grass track and bursting in vast explosions of flame across the flats.

Even in the well it grew suffocatingly hot. They drank the water in Andrew's quart pot and, wetting strips of clothing in the tainted water of the well, held them to their faces. Broken banners of flame flapped above them, and wildly rolling copper and orange smoke stung down.

Then the fire was past them. A great, steady heat rose from the ruined land. After half an hour Andrew tried the heated surface rocks with his hand and said, " We can come out ! "

The boy shinned up first, and reached down for his mother. When she was up, Andrew handed the old dog to her, and then the boy and girl pulled him out.

Everywhere to west and north and east, little fires were burning rosily and ghost wraiths of smoke eddied upward. To the south the fire swept on, a devouring surf of flame. The heat was almost unendurable, but it was diminishing as the night air sucked over the ruined world.

The girl said, " Thank you for bringing us here. We wouldn't

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have reached the road. How was it you were on our road?"

"I was camping by the river," Andrew said. "Thought you mightn't know of the well and mightn't have time to get out. Used—to know this country very well."

"It was very brave of you to come for us," the boy said.

"Never did care for roast schoolboy," Andrew muttered.

The boy laughed with a sweet treble ring to the sound. "I wouldn't have liked roast Bluey either!" His arms hugged his mother and the dog. "Golly, I'm thirsty!"

Andrew shone the torch down the well. There was still dampness in the old cleft to the north. He told the boy, "Get down and work at the crack. There'll be a trickle there."

When the water came clear, the boy caught it in Andrew's quart pot. When there was a small cupful of liquid in the quart, the boy passed it up to his mother. Then he caught water for Andrew and filled a little hole in the rock for the dog. Only then did he drink. A good boy, steady and considerate beyond his years.

Having climbed out again, he curled eagerly beside Andrew and produced a handful of crumpled grass seeds from his pocket. "These are my special seeds! I've been trying to cross the good little grass with the big grass that grows too much. It's all just come big grass yet. But you can never tell what you may find one morning!"

"Or night!" Andrew said, somewhat oddly. Before the boy went to sleep, he said, "Mother, could I speak to you?" To Andrew, he said, "Will you excuse us?"

As mother and son returned to the well, the boy was holding the girl's hand. He smiled at Andrew. Having lain down, he suddenly jumped up again and gave Andrew a hug. "Thank you again for being good and kind—for saving us!"

When the boy was asleep, the girl and Andrew sat watching the myriad winking of the fire. She said, "Tony said some of it, but I'm still trying to find the proper words to thank you for saving us from being burned to death—and to apologize for your having had to take such risks for us!"

She smiled at him. "My name is Martha."

He said, "My name is Andrew. Now we are introduced. You have a fine boy—an exceptional boy. Not the sort of boy one expects to have the luck to stumble into on a little road."

She looked at him with the boy's soft eagerness. "Please do not be offended! But you are not the sort of man to be walking the roads! Tony and I are not going to have very much to offer anyone, but we would be very happy—and very much honoured—if you would come to live with us. There won't be anything but

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tents for a while, but we would like our home to be your home, and we would be someone of your own to love you!"

She knelt swiftly beside him. "You are such a dear, Andrew! We want you, Andrew!

"Something like tonight changes time so that one knows a great deal about a person very quickly. We love you, Andrew! Please do not just go away, so that we would not even know what happened to you!

"We could not bear that! We would be worrying about someone who has become very dear to us. And we are lonely, Andrew." Her voice was young and eager. "For what the offer is worth, it is, oh, so very sincerely meant! It was what Tony wanted to speak to me about just now."

"It's as nice an offer as I've heard!" Andrew said. "As nice an offer as could be made! But you shouldn't be lonely. What you need is a young man. Should have been plenty of them!"

She settled herself again against the rocks and her eyelids pushed her lashes together as she laughed.

"As a matter of fact, there have been several—very nice young men. And I suppose I should have said yes to one of them—but I didn't want to!"

Her young face that was also a self-composed, a self-amused and a very strong face, was beautiful against the re-gathering darkness.

"It isn't that I think Michael wouldn't have wanted me to remarry. It's just that we had something so very perfect, so especially and quite wonderfully good. As if, just sometimes, if a thing is perfect enough, so much happiness is put into your hands that it doesn't end when it ends. I think that can happen, just sometimes."

"It is an unfashionable theory and I would be a biased judge," Andrew said. "I knew a singularly fine woman a great many years ago. She was my wife. I could never set anyone else in her place."

"Even for Tony, I'm not sure I was wrong. The nice young men all thought his grass seeds so howlingly funny—and I know nothing but worse waste grass may come of his little pocketfuls of seeds, but I don't think them as funny as all that."

"He isn't funny!" Andrew said.

"The unfortunate reverse of the picture is that Tony is clever, and I worry in case we stay so poor the cleverness can't be trained. Already he needs books I can't buy and teachers I can't afford—and even another point of view I may not have. He needs a wise, kind man for a friend. That's one way in which you could help us, Andrew!"

Andrew was silent for a long while. Suddenly he said, "Are you absolutely sure that you don't want—the nice young men?

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If you are absolutely sure, I have a proposition—of business and of friendship—that might be helpful to us both."

He paused. "I am Andrew McNair. I have been looking—for certain things that I no longer have in life. You and the boy are all I need to know that I have found them at last. The problem I have been considering just now is how both you sweet children can be protected. There is, in your case, my dear, a grave legal difficulty that could perhaps be solved only in one way. Even then my relatives—bless 'em!—will certainly charge me with insanity. But I think I could spike their guns!"

From between ruddy cheeks and white eyebrows, Old Andrew looked up at the eminent judges and at the eminent physicians.

"While from my standpoint, gentlemen, you are all young men, I have gambled on your having come far enough in life to have some understanding of a very old man's thought, even where it has wandered into fantasy."

"As a mere youth of seventy," the chief justice murmured, "I have followed Mr. McNair's thought with considerable interest and his journey with—er—something of personal envy . . . Proceed, Mr. McNair!"

"Before the legal representatives of my relatives complete the list of charges, I would like to ask the impressive array of legal talent assembled here if it is possible to suggest any other method than the one which I decided on, by which a young woman's right of inheritance could have been assured?

"I would like to ask if I was not correct in believing that for a wealthy and elderly man to adopt a beautiful young woman whom he thinks of as a daughter would present difficulties that would amount to impossibilities and certainly last for years, while, if he omits adoption and simply makes her one of his heirs, his relatives could make her reputation a scandal, her life a hell and her inheritance a legal fee? The said elderly man's motives in either case being open to serious misinterpretation?"

"That is perhaps an understatement," a bewigged barrister said, smiling.

"I would also like the agreement of the medical authorities gathered here that, desiring to secure the legal protection of two charming children, I was not over-fanciful in thinking it wise to secure it as rapidly as possible?"

"Mr. McNair may have many very good years before him—but the average expectancy of life of the human male is still under sixty years," a famous doctor remarked.

"Thank you," Old Andrew said. "Perhaps my relatives' representative will complete the list?"

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The legal representative of the McNair relatives rose to speak, without enthusiasm. " . . . . that Andrew McNair, while obviously of unsound mind and while wandering as a common swagman a thousand miles from his home, did suddenly present himself before a justice of the peace to go through a ceremony of marriage with a young woman some fifty-five years his junior whom he had known less than three days, it being further understood that Andrew McNair had proposed marriage when he had known her less than three hours, there being little doubt that Andrew McNair had been induced to this step by undue influence and flattery on the part of this woman and her son."

" Flattery ? Yes, the flattery of young and innocent kindness that wanted to share with an old man the tragically little it had ! "

" Andrew McNair, still further, having met this itinerant young woman and her son wholly by chance while wandering in a presumably irresponsible state down an unmapped grass track—"

" ' Wholly by chance ' ? H'mm," Andrew said. " Don't believe any of you were personally acquainted with George, his Grace the late Bishop of Clewminster ? "

" If, but briefly, the court shared that thought-provoking experience ! " the Chief Justice said.

Finally, he rose, amidst the sounds of men coming to their feet. " It is the unanimous opinion of our associates, both medical and legal," he announced, " that we have already too long detained Mr. McNair and that he should forthwith be allowed to rejoin his very charming new family to celebrate the dismissal of the charge brought against him."

" Thank you, gentlemen ! Thank you very much ! " Andrew said. " It was because of the hope that this might be a good day that I am dressed in this manner."

His glance touched the jewels and ribbons on his breast.

" The boy, it seems, admires them ! "

* * *

FLIGHT OF FANCY

At a New York gallery recently a woman looked at a painting which bore a large plaque saying : " By Sir Thomas Lawrence, R.A."

" Good heavens," she said, " imagine his being in the Royal Air Force, too."

PETERBOROUGH, *in The Daily Telegraph*.

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RICKSHAW

I heard it too, the sound of wheels and running footsteps

by EDITH MACWHIRTER

I HAVE lit my pipe for company, and I am sitting at our Himalayan window.

The high snows have long since lost their sunset colour, and the outlines of the closer hills are only a suggestion against the sky: I see them, star-dusted with the evening lights, dark-framed by the massive shapes of cryptomeria trees.

Down in the heart of the bazaar the climbing insistence of a lonely trumpet calls to prayer; and already the mist has begun to creep up from the valley, fading the flowering lights, and throwing the shapes of bare trees into inky relief.

From nothingness the copper spun telegraph-wires resolve into fine distinction and stretch their tenuous pattern before the all-revealing mist: a slow minute, and they vanish again, and with them the diamond promontories of the hills dissolve vaporously away.

Only the olive-dark framing of the cryptomeria trees endures. Soon that too will be gone, and nothing more will remain but the mist slowly climbing our hill to come breathing against the house.

Then I shall lean out and close the window and hide it behind the warm patterning of the curtains, and turn my back on all that lies beyond, for then there will be only the room.

I shall cross the room, stretching my elderly shadow like a ghost between the firelight and its warm reflection on the walls: I shall cross the room and bending stiffly down throw yet another log on to the fire. It will bubble and hiss; the blue smoke will wreathe protectingly about it until the first spark escapes and a fresh flame leaps at the chimney.

And I shall go on making play with the fire, raking out the ash, tidying the hearth, delaying the moment when I must look up and find your chair beside me, harrowing my memory so sharply that I think I see you sitting there in the firelight, youthful and relaxed, as you were that night, with the mud still fresh on your shoes from your evening walk.

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Your hair was darker and softer than the shadows behind your head. Your young lips were redder than the heart embers of the fire, whose restless flames tried in vain to bring a false vivacity to your face. But your eyes were calm and unassailable, your smile rare and intended; and your nature was revealed in your hands resting, crossed and placid, in your lap.

The firelight agitated the new gold of our wedding-ring as if it would stir your fingers to the fretfulness of other feminine hands, goad them to the restless urging of knitting-pins, or the picking insistence of a threaded needle, rouse them to flutter and to fidget.

But the fire was unavailing. What did it know of tranquillity, or the contentment of the serene? Or did it mistake the tranquil for the listless, and misjudge serenity as apathy? It went flickering on beside us, and the thoughtful smoke from my pipe rose bluely between us, so that sometimes I saw you clearly in the sharp firelight and sometimes softly through an aromatic hazing, as if my eyes were not sure whether they looked proudly on achieved reality, or wistfully at elderly imaginings.

And then the tobacco was smoked out, and the hollow knocking of my pipe against the hearth brought sound to our silent room. Simultaneously your eyes deepened with a listening look. Then I heard it too, the sound of wheels and running footsteps on the gravel of the drive. It grew louder and closer. A rickshaw stopped at the door.

"Who can this be?" I asked. You looked slowly at the clock. But no footfalls mounted the steps, no steps resounded on the threshold, no bell rang at the door.

I crossed the room again and opened the window on the drive. The misted night air billowed about me. You came to stand beside me, to hold the curtains still and to look out across my shoulder.

In the porch was a rickshaw. It stood dark-hooded, dark-aproned, its lamps glowing their twin light patterns on the ground. It stood complete and finite, black and empty, as tangible as the curtain in your hand, as unaccountable as the drifting direction of the mist.

Beyond it, scuffling their feet on the gravel and breathing a little heavily from the long run up the hill, were the four rickshaw men. Their heads turned expectantly as the window opened, but their faces were in shadow and their voices came a little hoarsely, a little distantly:

"Rickshaw! Rickshaw!"

I shook my head. There was some mistake. We had ordered no rickshaw. Their voices rose in a babelled answer, protesting,

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insisting. The rickshaw had been ordered for that evening. It had been ordered for that house for that evening.

It was hard to gain silence enough to make an impression on their ears. Definitely no rickshaw was required at our bungalow that night. Did they understand? They looked at each other swiftly, muttering among themselves; and then the tallest of the four men stepped forward and stood on the paving of the porch.

The light from the open window slanted across his face as he looked up. He was young and hatless and his soft dark hair was drawn smoothly into a pigtail. It hung silkily over one shoulder ending in the flourish of a magenta tassel. His skin, even and copper-coloured, moulded his face in gentle planes.

His eyes, almond-slanted above taut cheek bones, were a dreamy, not a lively, brown. They were gentle, youthfully gentle; and so were the lines of his mouth; and so were the hands clasping the tattered brim of his hat.

He looked up at the window as he began to speak, and then down at the ground. The turquoise ear-ring swung in and out of the shadow as he turned his head. He was thin and poorly clad. His shirt sleeve was torn, his trousers ended raggedly inches short of his ankles and his feet were bare. But his voice was grave and clear, and when he spoke everyone was silent.

He said only a few words repeating what already had been told. They had come because they believed the rickshaw to be ordered for our house at that hour that night, but if I was sure it was not wanted then they would go again. If I was quite sure—and a note of urgency crept into his voice, quite sure, he insisted again, that there was not someone else in the house perhaps—

I shook my head a third and a fourth time repeating firmly that we had neither ordered nor did we need a rickshaw. Possibly it was some other house nearby, there were many bungalows on the hillside, and their drives were easily confused.

So the rickshaw wallah moved back into the shadows again. He motioned the others to their places and bent down to the shaft. As the rickshaw was raised and its lights slid ahead down the drive, you leant over my shoulder looking out.

Your hand rested beside mine on the window sill, and instantly the gentle rickshaw-puller looked up at the window again. His eyes now were hidden in the shadow of his hat but his mouth was curved in a confident smile.

"Rickshaw, Missie? Missie, rickshaw?"

He spoke as if the recent conversation had never been, with assurance and entreaty, as if his voice must compel an affirmative reply.

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"I've told you already we want no rickshaw here tonight," I answered him impatiently again, leaning out to close the window angrily on his inquiry.

But he still stood there with his hand on the shaft looking up and beyond me, to where you were shaking your head, slowly and negatively, whilst your hand traced an idle pattern on the curtain cloth, as if, wonderingly and unwillingly, you were writing some long-forgotten name.

"Rickshaw, Missie?"

I closed the window harshly, but its glass wasn't able to deflect the intention of your answering smile.

"Missie, rickshaw?"

Faint and urgent the call came through the glass. And you were still looking down at the drive as the wheels and the footsteps died away. And looking and listening and tracing the same absorbing pattern with your hand, you were smiling a strange young smile, smiling at nothing at all.

It was not like you and I did not like it. I did not like the rickshaw and I did not like the smile. It had changed the feeling of our evening, and I tried to shake it free again, to bring our room back to its ordinary perspective by my comments on the irritation at the house where the rickshaw had not arrived.

But my joking fell lifeless as an autumn leaf. It did not seem to reach you sitting there in your chair behind the barricade of your restless tracing hand and your youthful, meaningless smile. It was not like you and I did not like it. Yet tomorrow, I told myself, it will be forgotten.

My self-comforting was useless, for next evening and the next, and afterwards each evening, with the mist and the firelight, the wheels and the feet would come crunching up the drive—the wheels spurting gravel as they passed; three pairs of feet clattering on the stones; and the fourth pair running silent and bare.

And, at first, each evening you would half turn your head to listen, and listening, half smile, whilst your hand would begin to trace a restless pattern on the arm of your chair, for no longer did I open the window.

I had discovered that neither threats nor locked gates could avert the nightly pestering which I was determined to ignore—the pestering which I was helpless to combat. For a younger man, perhaps, there might have been other methods, but for me, defence could be only passive; and I was learning that the wheels and the feet which each evening came up the drive would, if unacknowledged and ignored, eventually travel down again.

And you, sitting silent by the evening fire, were you trying to ignore them too?

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Some evenings you would no longer look up as the first sound of the wheels was heard. Some evenings when the mist crept up and it was time for the curtains to be drawn, you would set the velvet-covered disc of the gramophone whirring by your side, and fill the room with a solidity of music, and cover the hearth-rug with black pools of records, disguising your listening in your eyes and in the enforced placidity of your hands.

But sometimes the music would die, untimely, leaving sound vacant for the passing of wheels and the running of hobnailed boots, and long after the wheels and the boots had outdistanced our ears, would come the echoing of bare feet running gently on in the cold of the night.

Then you would begin to smile again at nothing at all—your strange, young smile; and I would make a clatter with logs and poker on the hearth, and set the music reeling again, and laugh and talk and pretend another uneasy evening away.

Another evening, and another, thickening by sevens through the weeks into a second month, until that one night when I was late coming home to you. Already the hills had yielded to the dusk, and down in the bazaar the sad evening trumpet was raising its call to prayer, and the mist was coming spiralling up from the valley, was coming gleefully up from the valley.

It moved faster than an elderly man, and faster than his thoughts, and was already effacing the cryptomeria trees as it raced up the hill to our house. But it was not until the gate clanged behind me, and I set my foot on the gravel, that I thought of the rickshaw. Simultaneously on the path ahead of me I heard its wheels.

Why did I run? What did I shout? How much faster was the tempo of bare, young feet! How much more insistent the youthful tone of invitation!

"Rickshaw, Missie? Missie, rickshaw?"

But the porch was empty and the mist had reached our room before me. It had surged through the windows, it had glazed the mirrors and flung a coloured aura round the lights. It had dimmed the pools of the records on the hearth-rug, and dulled the leather of the empty chairs.

I stood in its course by our window with the curtain flapping damply on my hand, and I listened to the wheels and the bare running feet.

I listened to them for almost but not quite the last time. For even now when I know, calmly and irrevocably, that you will not return; even now when I find myself wondering, coldly and reasonably, did you ever exist—my contented, affectionate, young wife—except in my elderly imagining; even now if I stand at our window when the mist, mocking and muted, comes stealing up from the

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town, I hear the wheels crunching again, I hear the boots clattering again, I hear the bare feet running again, and the soft invitation: "Rickshaw, Missie? Missie, rickshaw?"

Faint and caressing and as inescapable as the thieving fingers of the mist, I hear the young acceptance of your laughing reply.

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across.—1, Warblers. 5, Bowman. 10, Russian. 11, Theatre. 12, Lore. 13, Copra. 15, Pool. 17, May. 19, Sepia. 21, Abodes. 23, Scratch. 24, Tiptoe. 26, Tooth. 28, Pot. 31, Mark. 32, Minus. 33, Anne. 36, Edition. 37, Too good. 38, Eights. 39, Tennyson.

Down.—1, Wardle. 2, Reserve. 3, Loin. 4, Random. 6, Omen. 7, Mitford. 8, Needless. 9, Story. 14, Paragon. 16, Visor. 18, Abhor. 20, Ace. 21, Act. 22, Stampede. 25, Parting. 27, Tin gods. 28, Piano. 29, Turtle. 30, Tendon. 34, Mint. 35, Noon.

* * *

ANSWERS to SHOPPING LIST

on page 20

1. *Madame Rocher Des Innouïs in "The Blessing," by Nancy Mitford.*
2. *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat in the poem of that title, by Edward Lear. They purchased the ring from a Piggy-wig!*
3. *Huw Morgan in "How Green Was My Valley," by Richard Llewellyn.*
4. *Rose and the Boy, Pinkie, in "Brighton Rock," by Graham Greene.*
5. *The boy who came to the shop of Mr. Venus, the taxidermist, in "Our Mutual Friend," by Charles Dickens.*
6. *Mrs. Smiling, the friend of Flora Poste, in "Cold Comfort Farm," by Stella Gibbons.*
7. *Amy March, the fourth daughter, in "Little Women," by Louisa M. Alcott.*
8. *"I" in the poem by Edward Thomas which begins: "If I should ever by chance grow rich . . ."*

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BRIDGE OF COLOUR

The bees were silent, watching it stretch into infinity . . .

by FRANK STUART

TO the bees, the stream through the wood was a living thing. It flashed and gurgled through a channel fringed with mosses and ferns and purple loosestrife, which cast a dissolving pattern of shadows on its bright surface and reflected a sky more beautiful than the original, for the white cirrus clouds and expanses of varying blue were ruffled and glittering with the playful movements of the water.

But the bees felt a guarded neutrality towards this active monster. It gave them water; but it swallowed them sometimes, too.

They preferred their water sun-warmed, and gathered it mainly from shallow puddles where horses' hoofs had sunk in the mud at the edge, or from stray splashes among the grass, where the sun smote warmly through the willows that bordered the stream. Each bee had her favourite drinking-place, which showed her own individual outlook towards life.

There were the eager ones, always in a hurry, who could not wait to toy with puddles, but must hurl themselves on to the very edge of the vast sheet of crinkling silver. These bees were irritated by playful river flies, darting at them angrily, but never catching them. Later, too, the may-flies—hovering and flitting and often deliberately tormenting, in their bold black-and-white, dancing through their single evening of life—infuriated the late water-carrying bees.

Precariously balancing on a dipping twig, the bees swung their bodies rhythmically, staring possessively round at everything—the discreet, pale violets; the tiny shrimps peeping from beneath the muddy edges of large, flat stones; the stately bowing of the underwater weeds; the rippling V in the wake of a moorhen. Fiercely they watched the strong shoulders and scarlet spots of a trout lounging carelessly by—for trout have a dreadful propensity for curling upwards in a sudden leap and swallowing a bee while the argent drops from the splash have not yet fallen back into the stream from which they came.

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Older bees selected splashed stones, safely away from the moving edge of the water, and sucked up delightful moisture almost as warm as the perfumed air. Others would settle on the branch of a may tree, where it dipped in the stream, and crawl down it to the water's curling edge. This was dangerous. Many a bee had been swept suddenly off the treacherous bark by some eddy of the surface, and had gone down, turning and struggling, chilled and soggy, ever feebler and darker and smaller, till the laughing, careless river raced over her head and she took her last glimpse of a sun-kissed world seen growing ever more remote through the intensifying lens of deepening water.

Sometimes the drinking bees saw cattle come down clumsily to splash in the stream. The bees rose in exasperation if a muddy foot loomed too near, only to dart back again as soon as the loutish juggernaut was out of the way. Sometimes they would circle, whining viciously, near the cow's head. It was a joke with them—they would no more have stung a cow than a willow tree; but the monster dribbled in alarm and stumbled hastily away stricken with bucolic amazement, probably sending up a new winged cohort as she went.

Sometimes, just now, as spring daily put on a more gorgeous gown of colour, the kingfisher, who flashed like a neon sign up and down the river, would bring his family for a lesson onto the pole that spanned the stream, marking a farm boundary.

He would range them carefully along the pole, two feet above the water, and stand, invariably at the extreme end of the pole, half in the shadow of the bush into which it was stuck, with the sunbeams piercing over his shoulder into the water like transfixed golden spears. Very beautiful he was, with his incredibly sharp beak and graceful stance, and that plumage which legend says was gained while flying upwards from the hand of Noah—the hue of the sky upon his back, and the reflection of the setting sun flaming on his breast. Very still, too—and if the eight fledglings did not tense themselves as though they had seen the Gorgon's head, he would rush along the pole and peck wickedly, and be received with squeaks and screams of dismay, only to return again and cock his bead-bright eye to challenge the quiver of so much as another feather.

So they would sit, rigid as coloured stones, perhaps for several minutes. The passing air did not seem to stir the down on the intent little necks. And then—*splash*!—Father Kingfisher would dive vertically into the water and vanish. Perhaps the belief that his dried body will avert thunderbolts comes from his thunderbolt power, since it is said that two never fall in the same place.

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Up he comes, as vertically as he dropped, and appears so suddenly on the pole again that it is hard to believe he has ever left it—save for the tiny, wriggling fish in his beak.

Commotion explodes like a bombshell among the eight fledglings; they scutter, fight, screak, wave wild wings to regain lost footholds . . . but their flashing blue parent taps the head of the little fish twice on the pole, importantly, like a toastmaster calling for silence, and hurls it from him again into the water, where it floats listlessly on its side, slowly drifting beneath the pole.

The furore that began just now was Trappist compared with what follows. Every greedy little bird can see an enormous, a colossal, meal idling downstream—in what must look to them like a boundless ocean of tossing waves. They hurtle against each other, squall with rage; one actually runs right under the pole and up again between gluttony and terror. But the kingfisher is a Roman father. Putting his head down and diverting that great thorn of a beak, he runs rapidly along the pole and pushes them all off, screaming.

Some make a wild flutter up and back again, shouting most unfilial abuse. One plumps flat on to the water and rises breathless like a tennis ball bouncing. One or two side-slip, wild balls of feathers, into the may tree. One alone makes a clumsy sideways dive after the fish, plainly thinking that death might as well come to a full stomach. He grabs the minnow by the tail and hoists it with colossal effort into the air and staggeringly on to the bank.

Seven fluffy forms arrive like seven cannon-balls almost simultaneously. They obviously believe that all is for all; but a thunderbolt in vivid blue pushes them apart once more, and the captor of the stunned little fish proceeds to put his life really in danger by attempting to swallow it whole. The others, gibbering and dancing with rage, are pushed away once and again; presently there is no fish, but a swollen, astounded-looking fledgling grossly proclaiming self-satisfaction and virtue rewarded.

The drinking bees see it all as they pulsate their shining bodies, or stand poised with rigid wings before leaping into the air like ballet dancers; the changing life and beauty of the river, its innumerable tragedies and comedies, are observed dispassionately and minutely, polarized according to the profits or perils that they bring to the golden city, and interesting for nothing else.

Not all the water-carrier bees go to the same drinking-place. To some, the water seems sweeter farther downstream. A few go as far as a mile from their city to gather the bright drops of life-giving fluid. The tongue of each, with its one hundred rows of little hairs, sweeps from side to side, gathering shining droplets in the hairs, while the jet eyes show infinitely tiny pictures of blue

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sky and rippled blue reflection in the stream, of tossing willow leaves and bending reeds and dot-like, passing, drifting weed.

Returning to the city, each water-carrier is subjected to a particular scrutiny, sometimes being gripped in scaly antennae and held still, or grasped menacingly in the jaws of the sentry. If there is no struggle, its hold is as light as the mouth of a spaniel on game; but any other answer save submission would be instantly fatal.

Strange creatures, these sentries, more sexless than the frigid worker bees, stronger than the biggest drone, more pitiless than the stream which chokes a drowning bee while laughing silverily at its struggles. They are females without mercy on even the dowiest baby, which they would dismember with nothing more than fierce rejoicing at the economy of effort needed to sunder its tender limbs.

Promoted—or, perhaps, degraded—from among the thousands who go out to gather the sweetness from the flowers, their role changes from love's messengers to death's. Ugly and hairless and grim as public executioners, they stand at the city gates, resting rarely and always alert to fly to their posts, and so exist until they die. There are only a dozen or so of them at a time; when one dies, another is appointed. The selection is made from among the fiercest of the field bees, those whose savage temper and naked torsos show them to be experienced fighters.

Perhaps they have survived an unfinished duel with a wasp, coming suddenly from an accidental clash at the stream or in mid-air; its scythe-like jaws have mown the down from the future sentry's back, whose supple strength in avoiding the fatal blow marks it out for a new and grimmer career. Perhaps the worn, shining body has been polished by casual knocks because a fiercely urgent spirit informed it always. But the selection of hairless bees as sentries is not chance. Like an oiled wrestler, the sentry cannot easily be seized; the jaws of opponents slip from scarred head and legs and body—and then comes the resistless parry that sends one more little consciousness out into the everlasting space.

Some say that sentries are condemned to their work because they have attempted to rob another bee colony, to gather honey by crime instead of industry. Though their fierce challenges are suffered by the rest of the population, there is always an air of loathing in the contact, which is shaken off immediately the business of examination is done.

The sentries do not care. They are loveless. They hate each other as bitterly as they hate those who legitimately pass in and out, and those trespassers on whom, in furious joy, they jump with murder announced in every thrilling fibre. Sometimes, when two

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rush together at an incomer, having reluctantly released her as innocent, they fly at each other quivering with hate, fasten avidly, and struggle whirring to the edge where they drop, still writhing, into the grass below. Some discipline greater than their rage tears them apart, and they leap up again to their deserted posts, ready with redoubled malice to turn their snapping jaws against a real enemy. They are like the higher creation: by hating, they hate more and more.

First to detach themselves from the drowsy warmth of the cluster at the cold fluting of dawn, they take up their posts long before the earliest water-gatherer is astir. Last to spring on to the cluster at night, after the latest honey-drunk reveller has spun belatedly home, they never sleep, but merely slacken iron strength a little and hang watchful nearest the entrance to the city. Any strange sound or movement on the night air sends them bolting to the gates as if the invisible shears of Fate had clipped them off from the thick, warm mass of their people.

If, during day or night, an intruder comes too near the city, though he be as gentle as a nightingale or as huge as a man, the sentries run stiff-legged outside the gates to the taking-off platform, fill their air sacs with a vicious whirr of wings, point savage heads, and poise ready for a battle to death.

They strike first and preferably at the eyes, and try to plant their stings there. Other bees may follow them out and sting casually here or there, but the sentries try to blind. Other bees sometimes insert the sting without injecting poison, but the sentries strike to hurt. Others sometimes screw themselves round and round so as to withdraw the sting intact; but the sentries force it in till it will go no farther, and then leap away from it, disembowelling themselves eagerly so as to leave the poison bag pouring its last bitter drops into the wound that none shall be lost and not one tremor of pain be avoided.

Today, the sentries were more sullen and snarling than usual. There were continual brushes and scufflings. Incoming bees were seized roughly, and almost flung away through the gates into the oak. Though the law, which none may break, rules that no sentry shall ever be resisted, yet the way the incomers turned their heads was menacing. Precious balls of pollen that had taken tiring pains to gather were jerked out of the baskets and sent rolling away. Old bees who had given a lifetime's service were knocked over and thrust and kicked out of the way.

This ill-temper communicated itself swiftly to the city streets. There was shouldering and shoving and deliberate bumping. Young bees, pushing their heads through the lids of their cradles, were stamped on by horny feet, and withdrew, pitifully agitated

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that the world should be so cruel. Gentle nurses were flicked from their charges by the passing of foragers towards the honey vats.

Only the queen and her maids went on their way entranced, like creatures under a lovely spell of magic. These maids have brief service with their goddess; a day or two and they must move on to other tasks, replaced by younger virgins with eager tongues and gentle eyes.

The humming in the waxen city rose louder. There was distraction here far more fundamental than mere irritation at the churlish temper of the sentries. There was fear—panic fear.

The bees rushed to and fro in the golden streets. Workers came crowding in, many of them with half-loads, some with none at all. Their movements were jerky, terrified, senseless. They beat their heads against cells. Some dipped wildly into open honey vats and began to fill themselves with loads ready to carry away in case some frightful doom fell upon the city and destroyed it.

The fanners at the entrance worked harder than they had ever done in their lives. No matter what terrors befell, theirs was a task of selfless duty and must go on. They dug their claws into the wood, bowed their strong legs for better grip, and flicked their wings too fast for the eye to follow. Disturbance in the city meant more heat exuded from frightened bodies, and more heat must be dispersed by a steadier, stronger draught of cool air.

Cool air! The air outside was thickening, becoming hotter and more humid. It had a sour flavour. Instead of refreshing, it brought vague fears and lassitude and enervating timidity. More and more bees came mobbing in, exhausted, though none of them now bore any sort of load. Familiar trees nearby loomed unnaturally huge in a weird, reddish light. Fluttering and palpitation and infirm despair seemed to fill the atmosphere. The sky was purplish and crowded down upon a cowering earth whose living things had vanished, and whose vegetation shrank. Though the air came and went like fetid breath, there was a coldness behind it as though death walked.

Out of the infinite distance, racing at blinding speed across the face of the universe, came silver spears of rain, hurled, it seemed, by an invading army of demons. They pierced and tore through the trees, with a great puff of hot wind behind.

Then, suddenly, a doom-crimson cloud burst like a rose, and from its belly there rolled a growl of thunder echoing away across the earth and out of sight. At the sound, the bees' perturbation was shocked into stupefaction. Where they had been foaming over the combs like black water, they stopped and crouched. So, when the world ends, might the multitudes crouch.

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A flicker of light as from the heart of a sapphire painted the inside of the golden city a ghastly blue without shadows—and vanished, leaving everything black. Before the normal pale light returned, a bubbling cauldron of thunder, in which earth was only a leaping speck of dust, filled the universe. The stiff oak shuddered and the sky opened and closed; the city moved; the bees abased themselves, though anger glowed in them and sharpened the cold air beaten through the streets by the rushing pinions of the storm. Outside, the rain throbbed intolerably, steadily gathering force.

Immediately, while the bees still seemed to await permission to breathe again, the thunder went rolling away into the distant skies like a drunken giant, the clucking of the rain loosed and spent itself in a few last, huge drops, and a patch of sunlight was flung down like a gold cloak at the foot of the tree, where every curve and surface glistened and a sudden, faint sweetness rose from the sodden earth.

Then, silently, a rainbow threw a seven-coloured scarf from end to end of heaven. The foot of the rainbow discoloured the ground twenty yards from the oak, and some reflection or evanescence from it became apparent in the city. The bees, reverently, yet in frantic haste, poured into the gateway and flooded like shimmering treacle on to the flat space of wood outside. The most fantastic thing was that they were silent. No bees hummed. No wings beat. They gathered there, crowding and staring at the stupendous bridge of colour that reached from them into infinity. What could they see crossing that single span of ruby, flame, gold, emerald, sapphire, purple and amethyst?

Slowly, the vision faded. Patches of vivid blue appeared in the sky between smudges of broken cloud. The bees flowed in through the city gates, and the sentries were subdued, guiding the runnels of crowding bodies mechanically, as though their minds were seeking truth out upon the bridge of colour, and only tired shells of scaly black were left behind.

Inside the city the murmur of industry recommenced and grew. But there was restraint in it all the time until, when the long shadows of evening gathered, it sank to the faintest humming, the song of the night. The glory of the rainbow had done something to the bee multitudes. Their sense of colour, so infinitely more intense than ours, perhaps makes the sight almost unbearable. The things of dust had looked upon the art of the immortal gods.

* * *

Perhaps one should not think so much of oneself, though it is an interesting subject.

NORMAN DOUGLAS, *An Almanac*

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The Other Place

by J. B. PRIESTLEY

A SHORT walk beyond Buckden, in Upper Wharfedale, is Hubberholme, one of the smallest and pleasantest places in the world. It consists of an old church, a pub, and a bridge, set in a dale among high moors. In summer, long after the snows have melted, there is rarely much water in the river, so that it glitters and winks ; and a man who has been walking for an hour or two can loiter on that bridge for quite a time, waiting for the pub to open and staring at the river.

He was already there when I arrived—a big-boned dark fellow about forty—and he was looking down at the water in a glum fashion, without troubling to re-light the cigar he was chewing. Something had disappointed him, and I found it hard to believe Hubberholme had not come up to his expectations ; so I spoke to him.

We agreed that it was a fine day, that this was good country ; after which I thought I might try to satisfy my curiosity. So I told him how fond I was of Hubberholme, and how I rarely let a couple of years pass without taking another look at it. He said I was quite right, that he could easily imagine himself feeling the same way about it.

" But if you don't mind my saying so," I said, " you looked as if you'd found this place disappointing."

" Well, I guess I did," he said slowly. He had a deep voice and an accent that might have been American or Canadian. " But not in the way you mean, sir. Nothing wrong with this at all. Couldn't be better. But from the way a fellow described it to me, I thought it might be a place I've been trying to find. And it isn't, that's all."

And now, perhaps because he did not want to say any more, he did re-light his cigar. But to show me that he was not unfriendly, he asked me where I was staying.

We discovered then that we were both spending the night in the admirable village of Kettlewell, further down the Dale, but had booked ourselves at different inns. After some further chat we agreed not only to walk back to Kettlewell together but to dine too ; and after pointing out that I was the older man and this was my country and not his, I made him agree to be my guest.

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As soon as I saw her

I knew I had been looking for her

all my life

On our walk back I learnt that his name was Harvey Lindfield, that he was an engineer from Toronto, that he had been married but was now divorced and had a small daughter at present living with his sister. He talked readily enough, and was clearly glad of company, but somewhere behind his talk there was a cloud, a shadow, which might be disappointment or bewilderment.

It was not, however, until after dinner, when we lit our cigars in the little sitting-room we had to ourselves and drank the excellent rye whisky that he had brought over as his contribution to the evening's hospitality, that I ventured to suggest that something was troubling him. And I admitted that I was curious.

"You'll remember," I told him, "you said that Hubberholme might be a place you were trying to find." I left it at that, but looked at him expectantly.

"It's the damndest thing," he confessed, staring at the frilled paper in the fire grate. "I can hardly believe it myself, so why should you? I tried telling it once and got stuck about halfway through. If you weren't a writer, I wouldn't risk it now. But you get around, you talk to people, you must know a lot of things happen that can't be explained. O.K.—this is one of 'em. The damndest thing ever.

"Don't think I could make it up," he continued, regarding me earnestly. "I wouldn't know where to start. Now if you were telling it to me, that 'ud be different. I wouldn't believe you. But I'm no writer, just a plain engineer, and you've got to believe me. I'll just freshen these drinks, then I'll tell it to you the best way I can." And this was the story he told me.

My company (Lindfield began) had ordered a machine from a firm in Blackley, and I was sent over to make sure this machine was what we wanted. Well, it wasn't. Do you want to know about this machine? No, I thought not. The point is—there wasn't a hell of a lot wrong with it, but just enough to keep me there in Blackley making sure they put it right. So there I was, stuck with the Blackley Electrical Engineering Company, and with Blackley. I forgot to say, this was last November.

Do you know Blackley? Yes—well, going through it is about as much as anybody'd want of Blackley. Especially last November,

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when it rained and rained and rained and if the sun ever rose and shone, I missed it. When they built that place, they must have wanted to punish themselves. It didn't matter how dark and wet a November night might be, Blackley was ready to meet it halfway.

It was still dark when I got up in the morning, and by four o'clock it was dark again, and in between it rained. Even when you went inside somewhere, pulled down the blinds and turned on the lights, you didn't feel you'd got any illumination. I thought at first my eyesight was going.

I stayed at the Railway Hotel, next to the station and with a nice view of the tracks and sidings. It was darkish and wettish in there too. I changed my room three times, thinking I'd get something better, but I never did. We ate in the Coffee Room, which had sideboards and dish covers and cruets and knives and forks big enough for a roasted ox, only we never had the roasted ox, just a few sad bits of meat and a lot of drowned vegetables. There was an old waiter, blue in the face from heart disease, and two sour-faced waitresses, one long and thin and the other short and thick, and both of 'em dead against us. The only time they looked pleased was when they could tell you something was "off" or you were too late to have anything.

The other fellows there were travelling salesmen, all oldish and defeated, not smart enough to use a car so that they wouldn't have to spend the night in the Railway Hotel, Blackley. After supper they used to sit in a gloomy little hole called the Residents' Lounge, writing long reports explaining why they hadn't taken any orders.

It wasn't much better downstairs in the bar. All the customers down there were either earnestly whispering or just sitting staring at nothing. They made you feel somebody important had just died.

I'm not saying the whole town was really like that, but it did seem like that to me. Dark, wet and dismal. Nothing to do, nowhere to go. It's not that I expected two miles of neon lighting every night and a Big City atmosphere. I've lived in small towns before, and anyhow Blackley wasn't that small—about seventy-five thousand people, I guess. But it hadn't anything for me that I wanted, except that machine I stared at every day, up at the Blackley Electrical Engineering works.

On the inside, for somebody who'd properly settled there, the place might have been all right, but on the outside, where I was, it was a living death. If any people there were having a good time, they were doing it behind locked doors. Oh—there were amusements of a sort—a crummy little vaudeville theatre, three or four movie houses, a café where a lot of kids sat about with steaming clothes, and one gaudy big pub where a lot of middle-aged dough-faced whores waited for custom and listened to a blind pianist.

I went home with one of 'em one night but even with the load of gin and whisky I was carrying, I couldn't make it and had to tell her I was meeting a late train. What I did meet—and it took some facing—was that bedroom, cold as organized charity, in the Railway Hotel.

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I'd have met anybody, getting off any train, just for a change. It was bad enough during the week but Sunday was worse.

If I'm ever sent to Hell, it won't be all flames and sulphur and roaring devils ; it'll be the Railway Hotel, Blackley, on a wet November Sunday that lasts for ever.

I know what you're thinking—that I didn't give the place a chance, never tried to make the best of it. But I did. Yet somehow I'd no luck. The fellows up at the works were friendly enough—after all, I represented a big order they wanted badly—but even when we all tried, we never got going.

The two I saw most of, on the job, Butterworth and Dawson, nice fellows about my own age, took me home and gave me dinner or supper, introduced me to some neighbours, made me talk about Canada, turned on their TV or arranged some bridge. They did their best and so did their wives, but it didn't really work out, perhaps because by that time I felt so damn lonely and lost I wanted more than I'd a right to expect.

I still felt way off on the outside, and couldn't break through. If I tried, got a bit personal, I felt they drew back. It was like calling somewhere when all the people in the house are worried about something, an illness they don't want you to know about or a daughter who's got herself engaged to the wrong man, and they're polite and doing their best but can't really attend to you with most of their minds.

So I'd leave 'em feeling more out of it than when I went. Yet I had the notion even then—and you'll understand soon why I say *even then*—that fellows like Butterworth and Dawson might have been real friends if we could only have got rid of the glass wall between us.

I'm no chaser—and as I told you this afternoon I'd had one marriage I was glad to get out of—but it's only natural, especially when a man feels so lonely and out of it, to see if there isn't a woman who might help.

And that doesn't just mean a package of sex, as too many people seem to think. There's more in being with a woman than that, though it has to find its place of course.

Well, I got to know a woman—she was personnel manager at another works and happened to step across to the Blackley Electrical Engineering place when I was there. Her name was Mavis Gilbert and she was in her early thirties, tallish, dark, good profile, with something pleasant and sensible about her.

I took her to the movies once or twice or we met for a drink, and one night she gave me supper where she lived. But that didn't work out either. In fact it made things worse, not better.

There was some fellow she couldn't forget, and when she'd had a couple of drinks or had been softened up by a sentimental movie, she didn't even try to forget him. Round about ten-thirty a little lost puppy would come and look out of her eyes.

I dare say she'd have let me make love to her, if I'd made an issue out of it ; but I knew there wouldn't have been anything gay about it, just awkwardness and apologies and then some quiet sobbing

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after I'd gone ; so I didn't press her, which must have been a relief to her but didn't do me much good.

In fact, just because she was a nice girl who ought to have been fairly happy and wasn't, who could feel herself getting drearier and couldn't stop it, she made me feel worse ; and by the third week I wasn't seeing her any more but killing the nights with a mixture of hard liquor and fairly soft reading matter.

And it still rained, and, as far as I could tell, the sun went out altogether. Sometimes I wondered if I was dead.

Then, just when I'd decided nothing could ever happen again, something happened. One afternoon about five, on my way back from the works, I was crossing the square in front of the railway station, to reach the hotel, when I saw a little old fellow slip and fall with a truck almost on top of him.

If he'd been fifty pounds heavier I couldn't have done it, but he couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and twenty ; and I jerked him out of the way just in time.

I took him into the hotel, made them give him some brandy, and helped to clean the mud off him. He told me he was Sir Alaric Foden ; and he was a baronet, though he didn't look like my idea of a baronet.

He'd spent most of his life, before he came into the title and the family property, out in India and the Far East ; and I'd say that either his mother or one of his grandmothers had been a native of those parts, because his eyes were like black beads floating in yellow oil and looked about as English as the Taj Mahal. His wispy hair and little beard were white, and his face might have been a withered leaf.

He always spoke very slowly and with an effort, as if his talking mechanism had got rusted up, and while he kept you waiting for the next word he fixed his black little eyes on you, with hardly a blink, until you began to feel you were already in India or China or somewhere.

He was obviously grateful and made a fuss about what I'd done, yet at the same time he didn't give me the impression of being really friendly, though perhaps by then Blackley had made me morbid on the subject. When he found out I wasn't doing anything the next night—and that didn't take long—he asked me to go out to his house and dine with him.

He lived about ten miles out but there was a bus service within a few minutes' walk. I would have to leave about a quarter to ten to get the bus back, but he thought that would give me long enough with him. And so did I.

From now on it's a peculiar story, and I'll have to slow up a bit and take it steady. As I said earlier, I've never told it yet all the way through. I can't decide yet whether I ought to rattle off everything I can remember or sort it out and just give you the high spots. Yes, being a writer you must understand that kind of difficulty, so you won't mind if I stop now and again to see where I'm going and

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whether I'm putting too much in or leaving too much out. And help yourself to a drink, won't you ? (Yes, I might as well. Thanks.)

Well, sir, the next night I went out by bus and found my way to the country mansion of Sir Alaric Foden, Bart. If I was making this up I'd tell you now what a wonderful place it was and what a fine reception I had, with footmen waiting on us and caviare and champagne cooling nicely in buckets. But it wasn't like that.

Oh—it was a mansion all right, though I never saw most of it, and I doubt if Sir Alaric had for some time. But what I did see was damp, chilly and shabby, and you couldn't have paid me to live there. No footmen, not even a butler, only a wheezy old woman to wait on us.

The dinner might have been sent out from the Railway Hotel, all except the wine, which Sir Alaric said was one of his best clarets. He took only about half a glass and made me finish the rest, which I did, not in the dining-room, all cold and cheerless, but upstairs in the library, where there was a fire.

It was a big room, and must have had thousands of books in it as well as enough oriental stuff to stock a curio shop. All through dinner and just afterwards up there he told me very little about himself but made me talk, chiefly by asking me what I thought about Blackley and how I was doing there. I'm not going to tell you what I said because you've heard most of it already.

" So, Mr. Lindfield," he said when I had talked myself out, " you are—unhappy in Blackley. Or at least,—bored, depressed—lonely. You would like—to visit—some other place—humph ? "

I said I would, but pointed out that just then I hadn't the time or opportunity, having to keep an eye on that machine.

" The time—that is nothing," he said ; and he waved a claw at a lacquered grandfather clock as if to abolish both it and time. " The opportunity—might be here. Yes—in this room. That is—if you are ready—to take the risk—of visiting—not some other place—but *the* Other Place."

" I don't follow you, Sir Alaric." And I wondered if I ought to clear out, although it was only just after nine. But I had to say something.

" What's the difference between *some* other place and *the* other place ? "

He giggled. I know that sounds all wrong for a little old fellow who must have been at least seventy-five ; but you couldn't call it a laugh, and it wasn't hard enough for a cackle, and if it wasn't a giggle then I haven't a word for it.

He got up now, and as he talked he began rummaging in a chest of drawers just behind his chair.

" The Other Place—is round—a different kind of corner, Mr. Lindfield. You turn a corner—you didn't know was there. Something of a risk. But if you should decide—to pay it a visit—I'll be delighted to oblige you."

Evidently he'd found what he wanted for now he turned quite

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sharply. There above the top of his chair were those ebony eyes, with no meaning in them that I could read, staring at me.

"I will make it—simple for you—Mr. Lindfield. Yes—a door. You will go—to the Other Place—merely by opening a door. And there—you see, set in the book-shelves—is the door you will use. Yes—that is the door. You still wish—to visit—the Other Place?"

"Why not?" I said, to humour him. I'd known one man who had a lavatory in his library, behind a door covered with false book-backs, and he had worked various gags with it.

"What do I do?"

Now he showed me what he had taken out of the drawer. It was a shiny black piece of stone, rather like a large pebble. He sat down, leant forward, resting his elbows on his knees, and held out the stone.

"It is simple. Look at this stone—stare into it—while you count—a hundred—quite slowly."

I stared at it and into it, and began counting. I could feel myself starting to squint. After I had counted twenty or so the surface of the stone turned into a hollow darkness that spread and spread as I kept on counting. I heard the grandfather clock chime a quarter past nine, but it seemed a long way off.

By the time I had reached eighty my eyes ached and soon after that I began to feel dizzy.

"A hundred," I heard myself say out loud.

"Now, Mr. Lindfield," said Sir Alaric, who might have been telephoning from New Zealand, "get up—go straight to that door—open it—go through."

I felt cock-eyed as I marched towards the book-shelves, but I spotted the door at once and I'd sense enough left to realize it was similar to the one I'd seen before, covered with false book-backs. As I opened it I thought I heard Sir Alaric telling me to enjoy my visit. Then I went through and closed the door behind me.

I was in a narrow dark place, like a passage, lit at the end by three or four bars of gold. When I moved forward, I saw that these were bright streaks of sunlight coming through a rough broken sort of door on the right.

I opened this door—and even now I can remember exactly how it creaked—and then I was staring, dazzled after the long gloom of Blackley, at a garden in full sunlight, in a high summer that looked as if it might go on for ever.

Now let's get one thing straight. It wasn't like a dream. All the dreams I've had have been patchy, with one sketchy sort of scene turning into another, as if there wasn't enough stuff around to make up even one solid background.

In a dream, I've found, you only notice what you want to notice, so to speak, and if a thing isn't in the centre of your focus then it just isn't there at all; there aren't a lot of things as there are in real life, waiting to be properly noticed all round the edge of your consciousness.

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This garden wasn't like that at all. It was solidly there, with nothing unfinished and patchy about it. You knew it couldn't begin melting away, change into a room or a ship or a workshop. In fact, it seemed to have an extra solidity, as if it had stayed longer exactly like that than any ordinary garden could do.

A stone-flagged path went through a sort of tunnel of old-fashioned climbing roses. At the other end was a small lawn, bright in the sun, and beyond that some flower beds, burning with colour, set against a rough stone wall. When I reached the lawn I could just see the far bank of a river, not unlike the river at Hubberholme but broader and deeper. Beyond were fields rising sharply, then hanging woods and scree and rocks, and above them the hazy summits of high hills.

It was a beautiful place, and you knew at once it was a long way from any trouble. And there was another thing, hard to describe.

Have you ever known a room where there was a busy little clock, ticking your life away? And have you ever gone into that room when the clock wasn't there or had stopped, so that your life wasn't being ticked away? Well, arriving at this place was like that, only more so. The busy little clock inside you had stopped or wasn't there any more. The old *tick-tock-tick-tock-hurry-up-must-go* had gone. Nothing was wasting away, running down, draining out.

I felt this at once, and it seemed to make everything sharper, more distinct, more itself and waiting to be noticed, whether it was the flame of the flowers or the blue of the sky.

I'd got some bearings now. The rough broken door I'd opened to let myself into this garden belonged to some sort of woodshed at the back of an inn. As I walked down the lawn I was coming round to the front of the inn, which was a longish low building with smooth walls washed in a faded pink.

The lawn curved round there, losing its trim look, and became an outside drinking place. There were stout wooden tables and seats. A path led up to the open door of the inn. But I turned my back on that door and went to look over the bottom wall at the river.

The nearer bank was quite close, with only a narrow strip of meadow, thick with buttercups and daisies, between it and the wall. A young man was fishing down there, and lying by his side, her head resting against him, was a dark young woman in a green dress. She caught sight of me, and as people do when they're feeling relaxed and happy, she gave me a smile and a wave of the arm that didn't mean anything in particular.

And then I saw it was Mavis Gilbert.

Well, that didn't make any particular sense, but there was nothing wrong with it; and I was glad to see her there, looking so happy, complete—and that stuck out a mile—with the fellow she'd always been thinking about when I'd been with her.

Good luck to them! I waved back; and then she made her chap turn round, and he waved too and made drinking motions before watching his rod again.

"It's about time too, Lindfield," somebody said, punching me in the back. That was Butterworth. Dawson was just coming out

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of the inn, carrying a tray with pots of beer on it. He gave a shout when he saw me ; you'd have thought the two of them were the oldest friends I had, and had been waiting for me.

They were dressed in old shirts and pants, and as brown and merry as sailors home from the sea. We drank the beer and then went loafing on the river bank, smoking and telling tales and watching the water slide by. No glass wall between us now—not on your life !

Their wives were around somewhere and afterwards I met them, all relaxed and friendly, not looking as if they were thinking about something else when they were talking to you. There were other people, of course, and some I'd met at Blackley, only they were quite different now, and others I hadn't, though I can't be sure.

You said anything that came into your head, because anything that came into your head there was all right and not likely to hurt anybody ; and so did the other people.

It was a long day, not because it was dull but because there seemed time for everything, like summer days when you're a kid. And everybody there seemed a bit larger than life, not smaller as they do in places like Blackley.

But I can't give you a proper idea of it. Don't think it was paradise or fairyland or anything fancy like that ; it wasn't. But don't go too far the other way and think I was having something like a nice fine day at a holiday camp. It was out of this world all right, but it oughtn't to have been, if you see what I mean.

It wasn't until evening that I met her. She was the daughter of the genial fat old boy who kept the inn, and she'd been away from it all day. Her name was Paula, and she showed me the room I had to sleep in, at the end of the landing at the back.

My bag was there too, though how it had got there, God only knows. And I didn't care, all I cared about was Paula.

She looked about thirty, and she was fairly tall for a woman, not scraggy but broad and firmly set, and she'd a rather broad calm face, with darkish brown hair and grey eyes ; and as soon as I saw her I knew I'd been looking for her all my life.

There wasn't much light up in that bedroom then, for it was just after sunset and the hills overshadowed the back of the inn, and the room was settling into a green dusk that seemed to put us at the bottom of the sea. But there was light enough for me to see the look on her face, when she waited a moment after showing me the room.

I guessed then she knew I felt as if I'd been looking for her all my life. You know that look of tender amusement women have when they're fond of you and sure of you too.

" All day I've been missing you," I said, though I couldn't have explained why I said it. " Everything's been grand, wonderful, just what I needed—except I've been missing you. Now you're here, Paula."

" Yes, Harvey," she said, as if she'd been giving me my first name for the last ten years. " Here I am."

I don't know whether she made a move or I did or we both moved

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together, but then I had my arms round her—all so snug and easy that I might have done it ten thousand times before—and we kissed. And not one of those fighting, let's-get-on-with-it kisses neither ; but one of the other sort you only find when everything else is dead right.

" And now I can't let you go," I told her.

But she pulled away gently, smiling at me. " You know you must. I'll be busy now until half-past ten. Come to me then—to my little sitting-room, through the green door at the far end of the kitchen—you remember ? But not before half-past ten. You won't forget that, will you, Harvey ? "

And she looked at me anxiously, the only time she ever gave me that particular look.

I promised, and off she went then, a busy woman. Well, for the next hour or two, during supper and afterwards, when now and again she and I would exchange a look that was like a clasp of hands, everything was wonderful.

It would have been good anyhow—the food and drink with friends so easy and happy, the jokes, the yarns, the songs and dancing after supper—but the idea of having her to myself later on raised everything another two thousand feet into the air.

You know how you feel at those times, and this was a whole lot of those times rolled into one.

How long I'd have been there if I hadn't got impatient and turned nasty, I don't know ; perhaps for ever. What got into me, what did the dirty on me, beats me, and you might say it's been beating me ever since.

But when people began to move off, mostly two by two, and I didn't see her around inside and the night outside, with no moon but a glitter of stars, was too big and lonely for me, I got impatient and didn't want to join in anything or talk to anybody, except to her of course, while the minutes went by like sick elephants. And I worked up some anger too, the way you do when you must have trouble.

To hell with it ! Why should she fix a time like that, as if everything had to be done her way ? If I was good enough for her to see at half-past ten, I was good enough for a quarter past—what was the difference ?

I stuck it out a few minutes more, but all the time stoking my impatience like a furnace, and then made a dash for that green door at the far end of the kitchen, daring anybody to try and stop me.

Nobody did, of course ; they never do when you're so hell-bent on trouble. There was the kitchen, empty and washed and swept out but still warm and heavy with the smell of food, and only a little lamp burning ; but enough light to show me the green door at the opposite end.

And now for Paula, who if she didn't like it, because there were still ten minutes to go before the half-hour, could lump it—after all she belonged to me, and she knew it and knew I knew it.

The green door opened easily—they always do, those doors—and there I was.

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But not in any little sitting-room with Paula, of course. I was back in Sir Alaric's library, with my heart a lump of lead. I didn't even try to turn back, because I knew I hadn't a hope in hell. And I hated Sir Alaric and his library, which looked like a crummy old junk-shop, and I hated myself.

I didn't want to look at Sir Alaric so I looked at the grandfather clock. The time was nine-twenty; which meant that my day there had lasted about three minutes in here.

"Can I get back there?" I asked him.

"Not tonight, Mr. Lindfield." He seemed amused, and that didn't make me like him any better.

"Why not? I've only been out of this room for three minutes. And I didn't intend to come back so soon. That was a mistake."

"It always is. Perhaps—I ought—to have warned you. But I did—tell you—there was some risk—"

More in despair than hoping for anything, I went back to that door and tore it open. There were shelves of odds and ends and a washhand-basin in the cupboard. I thought I could hear Sir Alaric having a soft giggle. I felt like throwing the big paste pot at him.

"I take it—Mr. Lindfield—that our little experiment—was successful. You arrived—at the Other Place—humph?"

"I arrived where I'd still like to be," I told him sourly.

"Then—clearly—it was the Other Place." He waited a moment. "You met—friends there—humph?"

I made my reply a nod. Though he was responsible for getting me there, I didn't want to talk about it to him. But there was something else I had to talk about.

"What's that black stone you asked me to stare at, Sir Alaric? And how does it do the trick?"

"It would be—just as sensible—to ask me—how the door—did the trick," he said reproachfully.

"O.K. then, how did *you* do the trick?"

I don't know whether he was sleepy or just bored with me, but after he had shaken his head, to show me there was no reply coming, he began to yawn.

But I had to know *something*. "You said it was just a matter of getting round a corner, though of course a different kind of corner. More dimensions or something. Now—look, Sir Alaric, I don't want to keep bothering you, so tell me—could I do it for myself, sit in my hotel bedroom and get round that corner somehow?"

"You—could try, Mr. Lindfield." He sounded very cagey.

I couldn't leave it at that. "I suppose any door would do, wouldn't it, Sir Alaric?"

"Certainly. Any door."

"And that black polished stone was only something to stare at and concentrate on, wasn't it?"

"You—must have something—Mr. Lindfield—to stare at—certainly."

Still cagey. And now he got up, and I knew the evening was over, even though it was only about half-past nine. Somehow my going

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to the Other Place—and I'd decided I might as well call it that—had finished things between us.

Perhaps he felt that now he didn't owe me anything for saving him from that truck ; we were quits. Perhaps he just didn't like me. I'd decided I didn't take to him, so all was fair and square between us.

" I seemed to be there about ten hours at least," I said, just to keep the conversation going. " But actually I was spending three minutes in that cupboard. That happens in dreams, of course. Yet this didn't seem like a dream."

" It wasn't."

" What was it then ? "

He gave me another yawn. " Forgive me—Mr. Lindfield—sometimes I cannot sleep—but tonight—as you see—" In other words, *clear out, Lindfield.*

There was more fog than rain that night, and the journey back to Blackley in the bus seemed very long and quite hopeless. At the end of it the Railway Hotel was waiting for me and was ready to do all it could to prove it was very different from the inn in the Other Place.

I was in bed by about a quarter to eleven and then spent the next four hours hearing railway waggons bumped and banged among the sidings.

The following morning, Blackley looked darker and wetter and more dismal than ever.

Up at the Electrical Engineering Works that day I lost my temper because they hadn't yet completed a new bearing they had promised me, and finally Butterworth was sent for, to explain the delay.

" And that's how it is, old man," he said, at the end of a long explanation, bristling with ministries and permits. " We keep asking them to get cracking, but if they won't move, there isn't a thing we can do. What's the matter ? Don't you believe me ? "

" Yes," I said, and then, taking a chance, went on : " But I was wondering what happened the other night—or was it last night ?—after I left you and Dawson to go and see Paula."

" The other night ? Paula ? " Obviously he hadn't a clue.

There was no point in going on with it, but I had one more shot. " It was the same day you and I and Dawson drank beer in front of the inn and then went down to the river."

Butterworth had his share of brains but he was one of those Englishmen who never look as if they have any sense at all. He had a big moonface made of underdone sirloin with some indeterminate features clustering together in the middle of it. And it looked so blank at that moment, I wanted to slug him.

" I'm sorry, Lindfield old man," he said, " but there's some mistake."

" Yes, there is," I told him. " So please forget it. I was thinking of some other fellows. But do get that bearing in as soon as you can."

" We will, we will," he said, relieved to discover I'd returned to sanity. " Hate to keep you hanging about like this. Look here, old

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man, come out and dine with us tomorrow. There'll be eight of us—two tables of bridge."

Well, I went, and Dawson and his wife were there, and Mavis Gilbert; and even the other two, a couple called Jennings, I remembered having seen in the Other Place.

So there we were, eight of us, and we'd all been in the Other Place, some of us spending hours together, living the life of Reilly. And though I hadn't much hope even then, I had to try them out.

I started first with Mrs. Butterworth, who'd put me next to her at dinner. Did she, I asked, know a delightful little spot with an inn among the hills near a river; and I described the Other Place in some detail.

I didn't even feel she was listening properly, because she was one of those anxious hostesses with half their minds in the kitchen; but when I'd finished, and had felt a droning bore, she surprised me by saying: "No, I don't know that place. Where is it? Oh—you don't know." And then her eyes widened and instead of being merely colourless, screwed-up and anxious, they were blue, young and alive.

"Mr. Lindfield, let's go and find it, shall we?" she whispered; and for a second she was almost the woman I had seen in the Other Place.

During a break in the bridge I was playing with them, I tried the Dawsons and Mrs. Jennings, concentrating on the inn this time, and telling them I had stayed there years ago and had now forgotten where it was.

Dawson said it was in North Devon, his wife was sure that it was in Gloucestershire and had been pulled down, and Mrs. Jennings told us she knew a much nicer little pub in Dorset; and I knew that I had drawn a blank from the three of them.

There wasn't a peep out of them to suggest they'd ever been near the Other Place. And what made it ten times worse was that I could still remember them there, which made this social evening of ours look as if we were playing charades about zombies.

We finished fairly early so Mavis Gilbert, who was running me down town in her little car, suggested we stopped at her flat for a drink. When we'd tasted it and were feeling easy, she said: "Something's happened to you. I noticed it, and so did Mrs. Butterworth. What is it—or can't you tell?"

"I can tell some of it," I said, "but you won't know what I'm talking about. I saw you by a river—it was a bright warm morning—and you were wearing a green dress."

"Did I look nice?" she asked, smiling to show me she knew I was talking about a dream.

"You looked fine. Very happy too. You were with a fellow—I think I can describe him—"

"Go on. You must."

"He was a stiffish gingerish fellow with the greeny eyes his sort always have—and a scar on the left side of his face—"

"Rodney!" Then she was staring at me, white and angry. "I don't think that's funny. Somebody's been gossiping to you—

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and now you think this is an amusing way of telling me you know about Rodney and me. Well, I don't think it is."

"Look, Mavis, you've got it all wrong." I took her hand and wouldn't let her snatch it away. "I haven't been discussing you. I never heard of Rodney until now. I simply described the fellow I saw you with, when you were wearing a green dress, down by the river."

"What river?"

"I don't know what river. I wish I did," I told her. "There were lots of people there, the Butterworths and Dawsons included, and you were there with this fellow. There was also a girl called Paula—her father kept the inn where we were all staying." And I described Paula, trying to remember every detail of her appearance. "Do you know anybody like that?"

"She sounds rather like a girl I used to know called Norma Blake," said Mavis. "But she'd nothing to do with an inn. She went in for occupational therapy. It can't be the same girl. I can see this Paula was very special. But where was all this happening?"

So then I had to describe the inn and the river and the hills, and I gave her a sketch of what happened there. But I didn't explain about Sir Alaric and the black stone and the door.

"I don't know any place quite like that," she said slowly, looking rather foggy-eyed. "I was never anywhere like that with Rodney—worse luck! But do you mean to say you dreamt it all?"

That's one thing about women, they take this sort of thing seriously, none of your "Come off it, old man" stuff about them.

But even so, I didn't feel like telling her the whole story. "I can't explain," I said, "but I don't think I did dream it. Somehow I went there—I met all you people, happy as kings—I found Paula—and then, because I was in a hurry, I lost her. And all you people who were there don't seem to know what I'm talking about, which means either that you weren't there and I was making it all up or that you go there and then forget—"

"Oh—I can't bear that," she cried. "I wish you hadn't told me now. It's the sort of thing I've imagined—being somewhere like that with Rodney—yes, night after night, here in this room, I've imagined it. And now you say you saw me there. You're making me feel miserable."

"I've made myself feel miserable. Let's change the subject."

"No," she said, "I must tell you about Rodney now."

And of course she did, with intervals for laughing or crying, and to her it was a wonderful heart-breaking story, enough to keep anybody on the edge of his seat, but to me, though I liked her and didn't mind what I'd seen of Rodney, it was nothing but two hours of trying to keep awake.

I got back to the Railway Hotel, which didn't want to let me in, feeling rather worse than when I'd left it to enjoy this night out.

Well, the next few days were like walking across a wet ploughed field wearing lead boots. I tried hard not to be sorry for myself—

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and about time, you'll say, and I agree; but when you're such a long way from home it's not so easy—and I went to the Reference Library to see if I could get a line on Sir Alaric's magic, and couldn't, and I also made some inquiries about Sir Alaric himself. But the people I asked either had never heard of him or knew he existed but weren't interested.

Come to think of it, people in Blackley last winter didn't seem to be much interested in anything. They just went on living for something but didn't quite know what. Sometimes I felt they'd have been better off in the long run if they'd set fire to the place and then started all over again.

Then one night—as a matter of fact it was a Monday, and I think living through another Blackley Sunday might have had something to do with what happened—I had a few slugs of gin, because the whisky had given out, and told myself it was time for action. After all, Sir Alaric had shot me into the Other Place, and now he could shoot me there again, if only to stop me wandering round this grimy dump like a lost soul.

He wasn't on the telephone, so I took a chance on his being in and caught a bus out there. It must have been one of the last, because it was late then for Blackley, round about ten o'clock.

How I was to get back didn't worry me at all, not in the state of mind I was in then. And if Sir Alaric had gone to bed, I was ready to make such a commotion that he'd have to get up and let me in. I don't say I was plastered but I wasn't exactly sober.

But he hadn't gone to bed and he invited me in politely enough, though I didn't feel he was pleased to see me. He took me up to his library, where he'd been drowsing over the fire, and then he asked me, with no old-world courtesy at all, what I wanted.

And obviously it was no use my pretending I'd gone there to inquire about his health; he'd spotted the mood I was in at once, so there was no point in trying to fool him.

"I want to get back to the Other Place," I told him. "And don't tell me to go away and try to go there on my own, because I've already tried and it doesn't work. Apart from that, I'm having a bad time. I've talked to the people I met there—all except the most important one—and they don't know what I'm talking about. I've even tried putting the place out of my mind, but it won't stay out more than a few minutes. So now, Sir Alaric, with your help, I'm going back."

"Mr. Lindfield—you take too much—for granted."

"That's because I'm a desperate man, Sir Alaric."

"Desperate men—Mr. Lindfield, should not attempt—to go anywhere. They should—stay at home and begin to lose—their desperation."

"You're probably right, and we won't argue about it. In fact, we won't argue about anything. I'm going back there, Sir Alaric, and don't try to stop me. Where's that black stone?"

And I got up and stood over him. I'm not proud of all this but I might as well tell you everything.

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But if I thought I could frighten him, I was a mile out. All he did was to shake his head at me, as if I was ten years old. "You are behaving—very stupidly, Mr. Lindfield. You come here uninvited—half drunk, I suspect—"

"About that, I'd say," I told him. "And you're quite right, I'm behaving badly. I've a lot of excuses but I won't bore you with them. Just bring out that black stone, Sir Alaric, and I'll do the rest. *Come on,*" I shouted, when he hadn't made a move.

We stared at one another for what seemed quite a long time—and I thought I saw a flicker of flame in those black beady eyes of his—then he went to the chest of drawers and brought out the stone.

This time he handed it to me instead of keeping it himself. "Do as you did before," he said coldly. "But be careful—to put down—the stone—before you go—to the door. If you will take—my advice—you will not—attempt this."

"I'm not taking your advice."

And I began staring at the stone and counting up to a hundred. Everything happened just as it did the first time—the squinting, the hollow darkness that spread and spread, the dizziness.

I put the stone down on the rug and went slowly over to the door in the book-shelves. I opened the door very carefully, as if something might break, probably because I was afraid the magic wouldn't have worked and that all I would see behind the door was the cupboard of odds and ends and its washhand-basin.

But no, I was back all right. There I was in that narrow dark passage with the streaks of sunlight at the end, coming through the rough broken door. Down I went, banged open the door, and hurried out into the garden, where I waited a moment, by the edge of the stone-flagged path among the roses, just to catch my breath.

I don't think I'm cheating when I tell you that even then, right at the start, I guessed something was wrong. But I'll admit I'm not sure what gave me the idea.

(Let me try and sort it out while you give yourself some more whisky. O.K., thanks, I'll join you. That's fine—thanks.)

Well, to begin with, everything I could see—and that wasn't much, remember—seemed narrower, not quite the right shape. And the sunshine had a kind of sting to it, wasn't mellow like the other sunshine I remembered.

And then the time trick wasn't working right. I felt time had stopped, as it had done before, but it had stopped *in the wrong way*. Don't ask me just what I mean by that, because I'll be damned if I know. But it seemed to have stopped in a sinister way. Anyhow that's as near as I can get to what I felt.

I went through the tunnel of climbing roses and came out on to the lawn, and of course now I knew what to expect—the river, the hills, the drinking place in front of the inn, the inn itself.

At a first glance, nothing had changed, except that I had an idea the colours were sharper and the shapes not quite the same, a bit meaner somehow. Like a copy of a picture that just missed it, if you see what I mean. And I didn't feel happy, not a bit.

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Then it really got to work on me. That river, for instance. When I saw it out of the corner of my eye, not really paying attention to it, it looked just as it had done before, a full smooth stream. But as soon as I really looked at it, to take some pleasure in it, then it shrank to a mere trickle among cracked cakes of brown mud. So I'd look away, and at once I'd know it was an easy broad stretch of water again. Another proper look, and it had dwindled again.

But the people were worse. As I stood there on the lawn, playing hide-and-seek with the river, I knew that where the tables and seats were, in front of the inn, to my left, people were drinking and talking and laughing, just as they'd done before. But when I turned that way, to shout "Hullo!" and let them know I was there, they all froze up and were as still as waxworks.

And what put the finishing touch on it and gave me the creeps was that they were all looking at me, not with any particular expression on their faces but just looking, like dummies.

I went towards them, half angry, half terrified. Not a sound. Not a move. Waxworks under an angry sun. I stopped, turned towards the river, and there it was, a miserable trickle again, while at the corner of my eye I could just catch a glimpse of the people coming to life again and could hear them talking and laughing. I whirled round on them, frantic now, and there they were, frozen, staring at me, silent as death.

"What the hell do you think you're playing at?" I shouted at them. Not a sound, not a quiver. And every goddam thing was wrong—the blue of the sky, the feel of the sun, the flowers that withered at a look.

I felt I was outside time again, but out now on the wrong side. I had to make something happen in that place even if it meant being flattened by some giant dead hand that would drop from the sky.

I went charging through the gap in the stone wall to the staring dummies in the drinking place. The first one I reached was standing up and I saw that it was Jennings, who'd been dining with me at the Butterworths'.

"Now look, Jennings," I cried, putting a hand on his shoulder, "you know me—Lindfield." And now that I'd concentrated upon him the rest of them were all lively again, and Jennings was the only staring dummy there, unless you count me. "What's the idea? What's the matter with you people?"

He didn't say a thing, never gave so much as a twitch, and I felt that if I didn't take my hand off his shoulder I might push him over. So I took it away, but the next moment, in a blind fury because I couldn't get any response from him, I gave him a sharp slap across the cheek.

And the next moment after that—and how it happened I can't tell you—I was down on the grass, out for the count, having taken the hardest punch I'd known since I'd boxed as a light heavy for the University of Toronto.

And while I was down there, waiting for the counting and the bell, I could hear, as if from far away, all those people talking and laughing

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over their drinks. Harvey Lindfield couldn't pay attention, so off they were again, enjoying themselves.

After a few minutes, feeling dazed and rather sick, I got to my feet again and looked round. This time they weren't all completely frozen. They moved a little, like weeds under water, and they made some noise—but it wasn't a noise I was glad to hear, for they were laughing in a slow dim under-water fashion, and laughing at me.

And then I wondered why I'd wasted any time on these people, if you could still call them people, when I really didn't care about them and had come back to find only one person—Paula. And I knew she wasn't out here. My only chance of finding her was somewhere inside the inn.

She was there, standing alone in the long room that was now as quiet and nearly as dark as a vault. She was no staring dummy but it might have been better if she had been, because the very sight of her standing there turned my heart into ice-water.

As I went up to her I saw that she was slowly shaking her head and that her cheeks were wet with tears. Everything that's ever been wrong between men and women, all the old long heartbreak, was there between us.

"Paula," I said, "I know it was my fault last time, but now I'm back and I came back, forced my way here, just because of you."

I'd have gone on but I knew she wasn't going to talk to me, that she'd do nothing but shake her head and cry, the way they do when at last they feel it's hopeless.

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Finally she moved away, and I followed her, wanting to say something but not knowing what to say. There was nobody else about; the place was empty, silent, a mile deep in misery. She went into the kitchen, which was cold and hadn't an appetizing smell left, and she walked the length of it until she came to that green door.

There she stopped long enough to give me a look and what might have been the shadow of a smile. The door was slowly closing behind her when I arrived—the big masterful type, God help me! I flung open that door and marched through like Alexander the Great.

But of course Sir Alaric wasn't impressed, and I don't blame him. I'd only been away a minute and a half this time, and he didn't care if I came out of his cupboard marching like Alexander the Great or crawling like the Hunchback of Notre Dame. All he cared about was getting me out of his house before I turned ugly and began kicking things around. So he told me in a hurry that a man who lived a quarter of a mile down the road would run me into Blackley for about a pound.

As a matter of fact he needn't have worried because this last visit to the Other Place—if it was the Other Place—had taken all the fight out of me.

Once he had got me as far as his front door, Sir Alaric felt he could relax. "It was not—so pleasant—this time, Mr. Lindfield—humph?"

"It was very unpleasant," I told him grumpily. "But it probably serves me right for insisting upon going again. I've not behaved very well. But, come to that, neither have you."

"No, Mr. Lindfield," he said earnestly—and I can see him now, a little white-and-brown wisp of an old fellow, very English up to a point but with India or China looking out of his eyes, "you wrong me—as well as yourself. You have been—to the Other Place. Forget—this last visit—remember the first one. Now—of course—you are dissatisfied. But you have something—I imagine—to be dissatisfied about—now."

"I had before," I grumbled. "We all have. They're almost dying of it in Blackley. All you've done for me, in return for not leaving you in front of that truck, is to add to my dissatisfaction."

"No," he said softly, "there is no addition. Not in—the long run—I think. No—a subtraction. You will see."

Well, I don't know that I have seen, though now and again I think I know what he meant. No, I never saw him again. I called at his house again, a few nights later, but it was all shut up and dark and then I was told he'd gone away, perhaps to stand on his head in Bombay or turn a prayer wheel in Tibet.

I took that fellow Jennings out to lunch, just to see how he'd react when I told him that a few nights before, in a place where people turned into staring dummies when you looked hard at them, he'd knocked me cold with a right hook I never even saw. And of course he didn't react at all, just told me he'd stopped dreaming now that he didn't eat cheese in the evening and went on to say that British boxing or any other sport wasn't what it had been.

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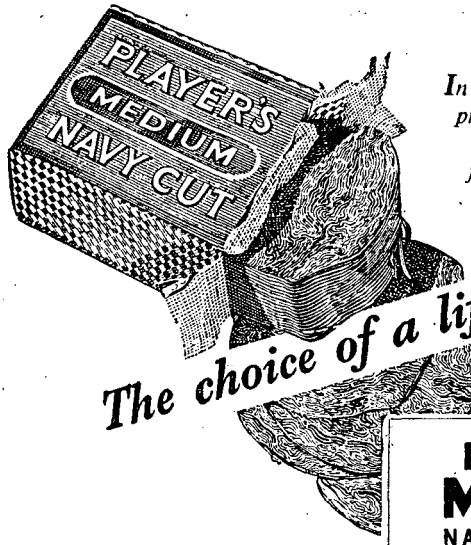

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I had a night out with Mavis Gilbert before I left Blackley, and she told me more about Rodney and made me describe Paula, though I left out the Other Place ; and we got rather tight and sentimental and tried to console one another with some messy half-hearted love-making and were about as clever at it as a couple of short-sighted bears. In fact the night ended just as I'd imagined it would when I'd tried to avoid the love-making.

Then the Blackley Electrical Engineering Company completed the machine to our specification, and after having it run and testing it for a couple of days, I watched them take it down and crate it and send it to Liverpool, ready for the next boat.

By this time my company was screaming for me, so I booked a passage by plane, and on one of those muffled, sad, winter afternoons I found myself at London Airport. I mention this because it was there I saw Paula.

You know the way they shepherd you around in airports, as if an idiot school was having a day's outing. Well, my lot was being herded out to the plane just as another lot was being herded in from one, so that a string of us passed each other. And there was Paula—no question about it, I'd doubt my own name sooner.

" Paula ! " I shouted, and hurried across to her.

She stopped but looked surprised, and not pleasantly surprised either. " There's some mistake," she said. " I'm Mrs. Endersly—and my name's not Paula and I don't know you."

" What's this ? " And the big fellow behind her frowned at me. He owned her. He owned nearly everything. He was one of those men.

" Just a mistake, darling," she said to him, and then she gave me an apologetic little smile, probably because I was looking like a lost dog.

I don't know what I stammered at them because what I'd suddenly seen in her eyes, like a sort of signal from miles away in their grey depths, had turned me upside down and inside out. And what it had seemed to say was something like this : *Yes, I was Paula when I was there, and now I remember you too, Harvey Lindfield, but where we were and what we can do about it, God knows !* And the next minute I was straggling along with the rest of the sheep, going towards the plane.

So here I am, back again at the first chance I had, but of course taking a holiday this time, with no more Blackley in the rain and the Railway Hotel. And I keep on describing the Other Place to people, and when they tell me they know something like it I go and have a look, which takes me to some of your nicest places, like this Hubberholme where we met this afternoon. Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Cotswolds, Lake District—I've been all over.

Oh yes—I tried Sir Alaric again, but he died last February—somewhere abroad. Yes—and I asked about the black stone, but everything he had has been sold or given away, and nobody seems to know anything about it. I know—I might try to track it down, I've thought of that.

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There's just one other thing worries me from time to time. You must have noticed this yourself. Now and again you meet people who look at you eagerly and cry, "Haven't we met before somewhere?" And when you tell 'em you haven't, you see a light go out of their faces.

Well, what worries me now about those people is that they may have been to some Other Place of their own and met me there, the way I did with those Blackley people—and of course with Paula. It's the damndest thing, you know, if we all keep meeting in some Other Place and then can't make other people understand.

My God!—look at the time. And I'm running up to Northumberland in the morning, because I've heard of a place there that might possibly be It—you never know, do you?

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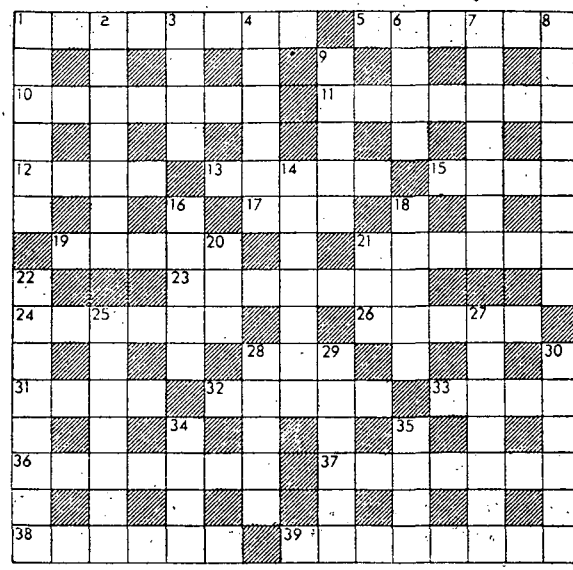
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 114



CLUES

Across

1 Would a reed attachment improve these birds' notes? (8).

5 Only by string-pulling will he hit the mark (6).

10 Iran's the place for us, though we're not Iranian (7).

11 Scene of operations (7).

12 Tradition beginning with the Rhine Maiden (4).

13 A crop uprooted is still a commercial proposition (5).

15 What to do with resources to turn them into liquid assets? (4).

17 Possible flower (3).

19 Pigment for a brown study? (5).

21 So a bed is just about the size of these dwellings (6).

23 Score, but call off the game (7).

24 If you're on this you should be silent (6).

26 "A forted residence 'gainst the —— of time" (Shakespeare) (5).

28 This kind of boiler is only an indirect source of warmth (3).

31 Evangelical currency? (4).

32 A thousand in us means a reduction (5).

33 She is in the American news (4).

36 The tide has turned and I on the end of it—that may be final (7).

37 If it's this it's unlikely to be true (3, 4).

38 Numbers on the river (6).

39 Cast a net round sonny and find a poet (8).

Down

1 The owner of Dingley Dell (6).

2 The most reticent branch of the Silent Service? (7).

3 Distant French joint? (4).

4 A chance creation of Smollet's, perhaps (6).

6 This sign is nothing to some beings (4).

7 Tim crosses the river on his head—on his way to our village? (7).

8 Unnecessary, but for the most part not without point (8).

9 "Thy laurel, thy glory, The light of thy ——" (Keats) (5).

14 This model will make an R.A. go nap! (7).

16 Even without it the guest could save his face (5).

18 There is something to dislike even in a cab horse (5).

20 Low or high, it means a good deal in a hand (3).

21 It isn't, however, playbills that reach this stage (3).

22 Pete's mad. That's why he caused this wild panic (8).

25 Sweet sorrow, no doubt, to unruly hair (7).

27 These deities are often found to have feet of clay (3, 4).

28 Instrumentalist's forte (5).

29 Turn this and you may find yourself in the soup (6).

30 Literally bent on the destruction of Achilles (6).

34 The gardener's source of wealth, perhaps (4).

35 Up or down it is still twelve (4).

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